



BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-ton

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

Table of Contents

[**Color Gallery**](#)

[**Table of Contents Page**](#)

[**Title Page**](#)

[**Copyrights and Credits**](#)

[**Prologue: The Secret**](#)

[**Study 01: The Feuding Cerberus**](#)

[**Study 02: The Doll with Arthrosis**](#)

[**Study 03: The Stationary Silkworm God**](#)

[**Study 04: The Scattered Slime**](#)

[**Epilogue: Connecting Memories**](#)

[**Afterword**](#)

[**About the Author and Illustrator**](#)

[**Newsletter**](#)

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR ZERO





CONTENTS

<i>The Secret</i>	PROLOGUE
<i>The Feuding Cerberus</i>	STUDY 01
<i>The Doll with Arthrosis</i>	STUDY 02
<i>The Stationary Silkworm God</i>	STUDY 03
<i>The Scattered Slime</i>	STUDY 04
<i>Connecting Memories</i>	EPILOGUE

Afterword

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

VOLUME
ZERO

STORY BY
Yoshino Origuchi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Z-ton

CHARACTER DESIGNS BY
solopipB



Seven Seas Entertainment

MONSTER MUSUME NO OISHASAN ZERO

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TRANSLATION: Jenn Yamazaki
ADAPTATION: Peter Adrian Behraves
COVER DESIGN: Kris Aubin
INTERIOR LAYOUT & DESIGN: Clay Gardner
PROOFREADER: Cae Hawkmoor, Stephanie Cohen
LIGHT NOVEL EDITOR: Nibedita Sen
PREPRESS TECHNICIAN: Rhannon Rasmussen-Silverstein
PRODUCTION MANAGER: Lissa Pattillo
MANAGING EDITOR: Julie Davis
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Prologue: The Secret

Glenn thought back to everything he'd experienced.

As a doctor of monster medicine, he was always busy. He rarely took the time to reminisce. But the people he knew, especially Sapphee, often wanted to hear stories from back in the day.

These are some of Glenn's stories.

It was spring, and a new manager had been appointed in the graveyard district of Lindworm. Molly Vanitas took over the bones of the first-generation manager and mimicked her original form.

"I'm heeere!"

On this particular day, a woman with a translucent green body burst into the clinic, bringing a rush of citrusy fragrance with her. She barged in without warning. Fortunately, they were on their lunch break. Glenn wondered what she would have done if she'd walked in on a patient.

"L-Lime?"

"Yesss, it's me! Lime the slime! Feeling thrice as great as always!"

The green slime—Lime—saluted. She was a nurse at the Central Hospital, currently clad in a waterproof uniform. Lime was a former student of Cthulhy's, and as such had

also been a contemporary of Glenn's at the Academy. He was entirely devoted to his studies back then, denying him much opportunity to interact with senior students, so he was somewhat taken aback by Lime's impudent attitude now.

Her pigtails bounced when she moved. Well, they weren't *real* pigtails. Her hair was formed of the same gel-like tissue as the rest of her body, with tiny bubbles floating inside. Whenever a bubble rose to the surface, it would burst, releasing the citrus scent into the air.

"I have Skadi's post-op report, yeah? Dr. Cthulhy told me to give you a copy."

"Oh, I see. Thank you." Glenn took the documents from her wriggling, outstretched hand. When he tried to shake off a bit of gel stuck to the corner of the paper, it moved of its own accord, navigating back to Lime with a squishing sound. "I'll take a look."

"Yeah, yeah!" Lime lifted her pigtails and flashed Glenn a smile.

He glanced over the report. It looked like Skadi was recovering well after her surgery. The chunk of shoggoth that had taken the form of a second, parasitic heart had been completely excised, and he was sure Skadi would be back to normal soon. Meanwhile, the Shoggoth itself had begun a new life as the manager of the graveyard district.

"Ummm...?"

"Yeah?"

"Aren't you standing a little...close, Miss Lime?"

"It's fine. This is how friends stand, yeah!"

"F-friends?"

Glenn didn't know how to react. She'd been his senior at the Academy, but he wasn't sure they knew each other

well enough to be called friends. Then again, Lime was friendly to everyone, so maybe it wasn't a big deal.

"Mmm."

On top of that, Lime's simulated, innocent-looking eyes—also made of gel—were oddly disconcerting. They were shiny, and looked just like the real thing, but Glenn wasn't sure how to react to their penetrating gaze.

"Oh, um...if you just came to deliver the report, you could have asked the fairies, you know?"

"Are you crazy? I couldn't miss this opportunity to skip wo—er, no! To deepen my friendship with you, Glenn!"

"Oh, ohh..." He thought he understood now.

At the end of their time at the Academy, Glenn was the only one of Cthulhy's apprentices granted permission to start his own practice. He'd had the best grades, but that didn't mean that the other students weren't excellent. For example, Sapphee had excelled at pharmacology, and there were several students who'd stood out as specialists for various species.

Lime apparently had horrible grades, but she'd apprenticed under Cthulhy for a long time. Glenn was sure she had some unique ability he didn't know about, but that Cthulhy found valuable.

Lime was humming. "It's my first time coming to the clinic, but it's nice, yeah. For some reason, it reminds me of the old days. You remember...the lab we did together at the Academy?"

"The lab...we did together?" Glenn tilted his head.

He didn't remember that at all. Cthulhy's pupils conducted independent research in small groups, but Glenn only remembered helping with Sapphee's. Lime hadn't been there.

He was about to tell her as much when she piped up.

“Uh, um, yeah, so—”

For some reason, Lime had grown flustered, ripples forming on the surface of her skin. If anything, Glenn thought *he* should be growing flustered, as he was the one who’d forgotten about their time at the Academy.

“Oh, hi, Lime!” As they both dithered, Sapphee stuck her head into the room. She was wrapped in the veil she wore to go out. “Doctor, do you mind if I leave for lunch? I’m also going to do some shopping.”

“Oh, uh, yeah. Of course, but...shopping?”

“There are some new medications on the market that I’d like to examine. C’mon Lime, time to go. You can’t stay here and bother the doctor all day.”

Sapphee poked Lime with the end of her parasol.

“Oh, uh, yeah.”

Lime didn’t even flinch. Since she was made of slime, it was a valid form of communication—though there was always a risk of the parasol being absorbed.

“Now then, Doctor. I’ll be back.”

“Be careful,” was all Glenn could say.

As Sapphee and Lime left, he began to prepare for his afternoon appointments.

“I told you that in secret!”

Sapphee and Lime were at a diner near the clinic. Sapphee was munching on a bacon and egg sandwich as she reprimanded the slime.

“Err...it was just so long ago...” Lime said.

“At the very least, give me a warning next time.”

“I didn’t mean to. It just came out, yeah.”

The surface of Lime’s body quivered. She was crying tears of lime and drinking lime juice, her favorite. Her pigtails bounced, flinging bits of gelatinous flesh in every direction.

Sapphee dodged the flying fragments. “Be careful, Lime.”

“But, but...I’m lonely, yeah? It was the three of us—you, me, and Glenn—in the lab together! How could he forget...?”

“It is unfortunate.”

Sapphee frowned as she watched Lime sob. She probably *was* genuinely sad, but as an amorphous being, Lime just looked like she was mimicking human emotions.

“So...how much does Glenn remember, yeah?”

“I don’t know. I feel like casually bringing it up just confuses him, so I try to avoid talking about the Academy.”

Sapphee kept her voice down. Lime was the only person she could talk to about this. Only the two of them and their mentor, Cthulhy, shared the secret from their time at the Academy—a secret that Glenn couldn’t find out.

“It seems Glenn has forgotten some things from his time at the Academy,” Sapphee said. “Especially about you, Lime.”

“Ahhh, it’s so sad, yeah?”

“Hey, stay off the table!”

Lime had released her human form and was oozing everywhere. While slimes could transform freely, like amoeba, they were also sentient and intelligent enough to converse. Even for monsters, their biology was particularly

curious. According to Cthulhy, it was possible that they were related to the Shoggoths, like the new graveyard city manager, Molly.

“Anyway, that’s why I wanted to take you out to lunch today,” Sapphee said.

“Huh?”

“I can’t talk to Glenn about our time at the Academy. But maybe if we talk to each other, we won’t feel so lonely.”

“R-really, yeah!” With a springing noise, Lime returned to her human shape. “Can we, Sapphee?”

“I can’t take *too* long a lunch break...but it’s nice to reminisce about school, sometimes.”

Sapphee thought back to her time in the capital of the monster realm, as a pupil of Cthulhy.

“I didn’t want to restrict myself to the pharmacology traditionally practiced by my family,” she recalled. “I wanted to study more advanced medical science, too. So I ran away from home, went to the Academy, and asked Cthulhy to take me on as an apprentice.”

“You had ambition, yeah?”

“When I got there, you were already studying under her, Lime.”

“That’s right, yeah? Then, after we finished our basic studies and moved up—”

“Right.” Sapphee sighed. “Then Glenn showed up...and all the trouble started.”

Glenn Litbeit was Sapphee’s childhood friend, and the love of her life. But the truth was, she wasn’t remotely pleased when they first ran into each other. Until Glenn showed up, the only students at the Academy were monsters

—but his grades had quickly surpassed theirs, and even the students who'd come before.

“It was rough, yeah?” Lime agreed.

The nurse and the pharmacist reminisced about their schoolgirl days, particularly the parts involving a younger Glenn Litbeit.

It had all started when Cthulhy ordered them to establish a laboratory.

Study 01:

The Feuding Cerberus

Long ago, humans and monsters fought each other in a war that lasted a hundred years.

The main reason the war lasted so long was the fact that the monsters weren't truly united. In fact, the term "monster" is nothing more than a catch-all for non-humans. There are over a hundred species of monster, all with vastly varying biology. Even monsters of the same species were divided into tribes whose nature varied by their occupation and the region they lived in, further complicating things. They say, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," but this did little to unite the monsters against their common enemy: humans.

The human troops, on the other hand, had a clear hierarchy that allowed them to form and deploy a massive army, while the monsters were reduced to skirmishing in much smaller squads. The result was a long, drawn-out war in which the centaurs were forced into a decisive battle in the mountains where the terrain put them at a disadvantage, while the lamia, who excelled at guerrilla warfare, had no choice but to fight on the open plains. Every battle found the monsters unable to take advantage of their natural attributes.

Needless to say, the death toll was massive. The monsters were desperate for a leader who would take them to victory. And, in the final stages of the war, that hero was born. His name was Rheocles, King of Beasts.

Rheocles was a hybrid, born of a mix of monster races. He united the scattered tribes and established an alliance between centaurs, lamia, harpies, mermaids, giants, and

other powerful species. This army could easily have crushed the humans in battle, but peace was brokered before any such battle could take place. King Rheocles went down in history as the hero who'd brought all monsters together.

After the war, Rheocles built a massive city in the very heart of monster-ruled lands. The city served as a symbol of unity, and as proof that the once-scattered races now stood together, deterring the humans from ever invading again.

Thus was born Nemea, capital of the monster realm.

Nemea boasted a flourishing economy, with burgeoning trade and a large number of churches that catered to the beliefs of many different species. Its roads were constructed with the most advanced technology available, even accommodating centaur carriages and providing waystations for them to stop at.

Most important of all, a university named the Nemea Academy, was established to educate the monsters—in the hopes that they would go on to achieve great things in years to come.

The Academy attracted educators from all corners of the continent. Here, students could receive the best instruction money could buy. And, although initially established as a school for monsters, the Academy welcomed students of any race.

One day, a young boy arrived from abroad. At the time, he was the first and only human ever to set foot in Nemea. Rumors soon flooded the school about this bright new student who'd come all the way from the human realm to study medicine—a prodigy who moved up in his studies only six months after admission.

His name was Glenn Litbeit.

A young boy walked the halls of the Academy, the most hallowed temple of learning in the monster realm. He wore the white coat of the medical department.

“Ahhh...”

The boy’s face was glum. As the only human at the Academy, every other student stared at him. Glenn was used to it by now, but...

“A voluntary research problem...in a laboratory.”

He sighed.

In his hand was a notice from his professor, Cthulhy, officially moving him up a grade. In the six short months since beginning the course, Glenn’s high marks had earned him a place with the second-years. This wasn’t just unprecedented for the college of medicine—it was unprecedented for the entirety of the Nemea Academy. The rules required a student to obtain professorial approval before proceeding to the next year of study, irrespective of how long that student had been enrolled. Most of Cthulhy’s students repeated grades multiple times.

And then along came a boy no older than fourteen—and a human at that—who advanced to the next year almost immediately, taking everyone by surprise. The other students looked at Glenn with envy.

For his part, Glenn was oblivious to the ill feelings of his classmates. The only thing on his mind was Cthulhy’s requirement for second-years to participate in lab work, of which he’d just been informed.

“Which lab am I supposed to join?” Glenn wondered aloud, rubbing the spots on his arm left behind by Cthulhy’s suckers.

According to Cthulhy, while second-years could undertake lab work alone or in a group, their research had to fall under one of a variety of topics. Glenn looked down at the list Cthulhy had given him.

“Pharmaceutics, herb cultivation, monster origins... whoa, practical application of blood transfusion? Can students really do that? Then there’s studying the development of the outer ear in different races...is that a fetish?”

The students at the Nemea Academy were brilliant. That was obvious from the list of research subjects. Glenn knew Cthulhy wouldn’t allow him to advance unless he proved that he was capable. He wanted to graduate as soon as possible and become a doctor and, if he was going to achieve that, he needed to produce remarkable results.

As a fourteen-year-old runaway, he also had to consider the school fees. Unless he took advantage of the scholarships awarded to exceptional students, there was no guarantee he’d even be able to afford the rest of his study. He had no choice but to complete the curriculum in the shortest amount of time possible.

“Hmm...”

Glenn sighed again.

Most students probably teamed up with their friends for lab work, but he didn’t have any of those. After a single semester, all of Cthulhy’s students clearly considered him an anomaly. He hadn’t really meshed with his roommate either, and had ended up in a room of his own.

“Maybe I should just do it alone...or ask Sapphee...”

Working alone seemed awfully daunting. It was technically allowed, but no student had ever launched a laboratory study entirely on their own. He had no choice but to turn to the only person he knew, which would probably

mean joining the pharmaceutical research that Saphentite Neikes had already begun.

Then again...

Saphentite had been a ward of Glenn's family once. She was basically their hostage, and he'd never expected to be reunited with her here. At first, she hadn't even noticed him. When they finally ran into each other, Sapphee was extremely surprised.

"I'm pretty sure she's been avoiding me..."

Glenn's parents hadn't agreed with his decision to come here, and he essentially cut all ties with them in order to travel to the monster realm. It was true that his older brother had covered his entrance fees and initial living expenses, but Glenn interpreted this as an olive branch for his return, rather than a promise of more aid in the future. Sapphee was the only person (or monster) he knew in the whole of Nemea, and she was making a point of not speaking to him. Even when he tried to strike up conversation, she behaved coldly. Now he was frightened to even approach her.

"What to do...?"

He had no friends, and his childhood companion wouldn't even acknowledge him. He could go to Cthulhy, who was betting on his talent, but she wasn't going to solve his problems for him. Moreover, he didn't want to wind up on her bad side...or run up too much debt.

Maybe I should just do it by myself...

"Oh, Glenn! Gleeenn!"

His thoughts were interrupted by a lone student sliding down the hallway toward him. Her pigtails were...bubbling? Her body was green and made of a strange gel. She was a striking sight.

“Umm...” Glenn watched the girl approach. “Remind me of your name?”

“Huh?!” The girl collapsed, flinging herself onto the floor in dismay. “I-I introduced myself before, yeah?”

“O-oh, when I transferred in...right? I’m sorry, umm... all I remember from that day is my lessons...”

“Can’t you at least say you were nervous? Even if it’s a lie, yeah?”

“I apologize...”

It wasn’t that Glenn didn’t care about the other students, his studies were just his top priority. Still, it wasn’t right that he hadn’t even remembered her name.

“Uggh...! I’m Sphwlllympf, yeah!”

“What...?” The way she said her name sounded like mixing a jar of paste. “Um...is that the slime pronunciation? No wonder I couldn’t remember.”

“Oh, you’re right, yeah! You can call me Lime! They started calling me that because all I eat are limes, yeah.”

Bubbles burst from her hair—or at least the part of her head that looked like hair. She smelled like citrus.

“Lime...”

Glenn remembered her now. She was the most senior student in Cthulhy’s class, though he thought that was probably a reflection of her poor grades. Her pigtails and cherubic face made her look younger, but as a slime, she could manipulate her body however she liked.

She wasn’t wearing clothes, but she’d formed her body into the silhouette of a collar around her neck and a skirt around her waist. The high collar gave her a sense of sophistication, but her speech and overall appearance was

more like a very young girl. She didn't look like an upperclassman at all.

"Ahh, did you...want to talk to me about something?" Glenn asked.

"Ah! That's right! It's terrible, yeah!"

"Umm, what's terrible?"

Glenn was utterly confused. He'd only spoken to Lime a handful of times, but here she was, acting as if they were old friends.

I've never been good at making friends...

When he'd lived with his parents, he'd spent his time reading instead of playing outdoors. His brother was the sociable one, his sister young and naive, but Glenn had been a timid child. Even traveling abroad to the monster realm hadn't cured him of that.

"Anyway, just come with me!"

"Uh...whoa!"

Lime let the human outlines of her body collapse, transforming into an amorphous green blob. She slid her viscous flesh under Glenn and slid rapidly down the hall, carrying him with her. He tried to resist, but with nothing solid to grab on to, there was nothing he could do.

"I'm sorry. We're in a hurry, yeah!"

"C-could you be a bit gentler...? Whoaa...!"

But it was futile.

The other students and teachers stared, speechless, at the sight of the human prodigy being carried off by a slime.

“Here, yeah?” Lime said as she dropped Glenn on the floor with a slurp.

She returned to her human form.

They’d arrived at one of the medical department’s laboratories. The plate on the entrance read *Pharmaceutical Laboratory*. Glenn was already very familiar with its owner.

“So that means...”

Glenn heard a cool voice coming from inside. He recognized her even before he saw her: Saphentite, the lamia he’d spent a portion of his childhood with, and his senior at the Academy.

“I don’t know why you’ve come to me,” Saphentite was saying. “This is just a laboratory. Umm...Cerve, was it? I understand you don’t feel well, but I don’t have the necessary expertise to help you.”

“Don’t say that! Please do something, anything! I heard you were the most talented girl in the medical department! Please, please save my puppies!”

“I-I can’t...”

Glenn could see Sapphee’s straight hair from where he stood. She’d grown more beautiful since he’d last seen her. She was still young, of course, just a student herself, but from Glenn’s perspective, she was an older woman. And, right now, she sounded perplexed. He could see the herbs she was growing, and the test tubes, scales, and pots for concocting medicines. What he couldn’t see was who she was talking to.

“Stop! He’s here, yeah!” Lime declared.

Glenn was waiting quietly for Saphentite to finish when his slime companion threw the door wide open, announcing their presence. For some reason, she had a strange look of pride on her face.

“L-Lime! Why?!” Sapphee stuttered.

“I brought reinforcements to help you with your problem, yeah? C’mon, get in there!”

Lime shoved Glenn into the lab.

“G-Glenn?”

“Um, yeah. Excuse me for bursting in, Sapphee.”

When they were kids, Glenn had called her his sister. But he felt awkward doing that now, in front of others. Besides, she was an upperclassman. He should address her with respect.

“Yes...”

Sapphee purposefully jerked her head away from him. She was literally giving him the cold shoulder. Had he done something wrong? Even though they’d played together as kids, things changed when you grew up. However sad he was about that, Glenn had keep his composure. He was fourteen, and well-aware that he was just a child playing at being an adult.

“Oh, Glenn! Everyone’s talking about you, dude!” exclaimed the other occupant of the lab.

Glenn looked to the back of the room and saw a girl kneeling on all fours, likely because she’d been groveling before Sapphee just a moment ago.

“N-nice to meet you,” he said.

“Nice to meet you too, dude! I’m Cerve, from the athletics department! Oh, you really are a human! I’ve never seen one before.”

“Woof!”

“Ruff!”

The barks drew Glenn’s attention to her shoulders, and the fact that Cerve had a dog head sprouting out of each of

them.

“I’m a Cerberus, by the way! These heads here are Orr and Ery!”

Cerve grinned from ear to ear. Glenn was dumbstruck.
I’ve never seen a Cerberus before.

Cerve not only had a tail, but dog ears sprouted from her human head. At first glance, she looked like just another beast-kin. It was the additional dog heads growing from her shoulders that marked her as a Cerberus—a particularly rare species of monster. Orr and Ery, as she’d called them, had their tongues lolling out and their eyes fixed on Glenn.

Each dog head has a separate brain and its own, independent will. The body may look human, but the Cerberus is unlike any other living being, Glenn recalled from his textbook.

“Leave it to me!” Lime said proudly. “Glenn is a genius—the most gifted student since Cthulhy founded the medical department, yeah? I’m sure he can solve your problem, Cerve!”

“H-huh?!” Glenn and Sapphee cried in unison.

Lime gave them a smug look and a satisfied sigh. Glenn had no idea what she was thinking. She didn’t know what was afflicting Cerve, but she was somehow convinced Glenn could solve it?

“Seriously?! Please, Glenn, dude!”

Cerve grabbed Glenn’s hand. They were from different departments, but she was probably his senior, too. She looked at him with hopeful eyes.

“Uhhh...”

He hesitated, unsure what to say.

“Please, Glenn. For me, too.” It took him a moment to realize it was Sapphee’s voice. She put her hand on Glenn’s shoulder. “It is too much for me to handle alone. But maybe you’ll have some good advice for her. Please, Glenn. Can you help?”

Glenn was surrounded by his seniors. He was at a loss for words. He was a teenage runaway who’d abandoned his family to come to Nemea. He had no money and no friends. The only thing he had going for him were his grades.

But now Lime, Sapphee, and Cerve were counting on him. What could he do?

“O-okay,” he said, barely squeezing the word out. “I don’t know how much I can do, but I can at least listen...”

“Thank you very much!”

“Woooooof!” the dog on Cerve’s right shoulder howled.

Cerve shook his hand, hard.

And so began the first physical examination Glenn Litbeit ever performed.

Cerve said she was a second-year student in the athletics department, which attracted powerful, confident young monsters from all corners of the continent. They were no longer at war, but it never hurt to be prepared. Of course, the Nemea Academy couldn’t exactly announce that it was training soldiers. Instead, the athletic department conducted their affairs under the guise of promoting health and fitness. Students honed their minds and bodies through a variety of activities such as track and field, javelin and discus, martial arts, ball games, and swimming.

"I don't like to brag, but I have excellent grades, dude."

Cerve stuck out her tongue. Her flaxen hair was pulled back in a ponytail and her expression was joyful. Her tail wagged furiously. Glenn took this to mean she saw him as an ally. She was wearing a two-piece undergarment that fit her like a glove. It was similar to the light-shielding undergarment Sapphee wore, though probably made of more absorbent fabric. She was taut, lean, and extremely athletic.

"I'm on a full scholarship...but my grades have been dropping," she continued.

"Why is that?"

"Umm..." Cerve's eyes darted uneasily around the room. She turned her attention to the dog heads on her shoulders. "Guys, say hi."

"Grrr...!"

Orr, the dog on Cerve's left shoulder, growled. But he wasn't growling at Glenn, rather his disdain was directed at his counterpart, Ery.

"Argrrr...!" Ery threatened in return, baring her teeth.

Orr seemed more aggressive, but Ery clearly had no intention of backing down, either. They were salivating, each ready to take a bite out of the other. Their teeth were sharp, and if given the opportunity, they probably wouldn't stop at just a nip...not that they could reach each other.

"Hey, stop fighting, dudes!" Cerve ordered.

"Grrr...!"

"Arf...!"

Cerve reached both hands up to stroke her shoulders. The dogs dropped their heads and did as they were told, but didn't stop eyeing each other.

“See, dude? Lately, they just won’t stop fighting.”

“Your Cerberus shoulders are fighting...? I’ve never heard of anything like this.”

Glenn glanced over at Sapphee, who shook her head. It seemed that, despite her excellent grades, she was flummoxed, too.

“It’s awful! I don’t know when they might start, so I have to worry about it all the time. It gets in the way of my sports!”

“That is...awful.”

“If my grades keep dropping, I could even lose my scholarship. Ahhh!”

Cerve was trembling. Everyone was welcome at the Nemea Academy, regardless of species or status, but that also meant the student body came from a wide variety of financial backgrounds.

“Can you think of any reason why they might be fighting?”

“No! There’s nothing! Even if I get them to settle down like this, they just start back up again later. The worst is when they both howl at the same time. Ugh!”

If she couldn’t come up with a reason, it would be difficult to get to the bottom of this.

“Cerve, I think it might be better for you to talk to a real doctor, like Dr. Cthulhy, rather than students like us,” Glenn said.

“I’m not hurt or sick, dude. I just want these two to get along!”

Cerve held her head in her hands. As soon as she bowed her human head, Orr and Ery started snarling at each other again.

Glenn understood. Cerve didn't think she was ill, just in trouble. She'd gone to medical students rather than a doctor because she was just looking for a consult, as Lime had said. He glanced over at Sapphee. He was sure she would help Cerve if she could, but Sapphee's specialty was pharmacology, and he didn't think Cerve's problem could be treated with medication alone.

Sapphee was the reason he wanted to become a doctor in the first place. When she was young, she'd fallen gravely ill and it was caring for her that had led him here.

"I understand," he said. "If you prefer not to go to a proper doctor, I'd be happy to take a look."

"Glenn! Seriously?!"

Cerve jumped up and down.

He thought she might hug him. She seemed very friendly. Having been wrapped in both Cthulhy's and Sapphee's embraces in the past, Glenn was well-aware of the monster propensity to be physically demonstrative. It made him wince a little.

"Okay, then...hear me out, and then follow my instructions."

"I will, dude!" she answered quickly.

Such immediate submissiveness actually concerned him a bit.

"See, Sapphee? Good thing I brought Glenn, yeah? Another perfect decision made by me, Lime!"

Lime puffed up her chest.

"Shouldn't *you* be the one having a consultation, Lime?"

"Each situation is different, yeah!" Lime said, ignoring Sapphee's sarcasm.

Sapphee let out a sign and returned to Glenn's side. "Since this is my lab, I'll help you. What do you plan on doing?"

"Yeah, umm..." Glenn was looking at the dogs on each of Cerve's shoulders. "I think maybe we have to train them."

Training. The moment Cerve heard that word, the smile disappeared from her face.

Glenn, still oblivious to the delicate workings of others' minds, didn't even notice.

The Academy cafeteria was a popular place, somewhere that students could eat their fill at a reasonable price. They offered meals for all types of monster diets including herbivores, piscivores, and carnivores. But what about humans? At first, Glenn didn't know if he should line up alongside his classmates.

Fortunately, Sapphee turned him onto the existence of the bread and grains corner.

"Let's decide what order you should eat in," Glenn said as he ate his bread.

He was sitting across from Cerve, who had a plate full of beef in front of her. It was fresh and raw, still dripping blood. Cerberii were strictly carnivorous, and Cerve looked thrilled by the prospect of the feast before her, but she sat up straight at Glenn's words.

"U-understood, Glenn dude! So, uh, what order?"

"Is that plate three heads' worth of meat?"

"Well, we only have one stomach, so we only need to eat enough for one. But everyone feels bad if they don't get

to taste for themselves. I always feed Orr and Ery!”

What she called a single-person portion was still large serving compared to other species. Cerberii must be heavy eaters.

With multiple brains, they must need much more energy.

Cerberii physiology was full of surprises. Her other heads weren't superficial appendages, but had brains, mouths, and esophagi that connected to her digestive tract. Cerve controlled the central human body, but she clearly couldn't control them, as evidenced by their fighting.

The Cerberii lived in especially harsh climates, even for the monster realm. It was possible that their other heads had evolved to compensate, specialized to tear through the enemy at point-blank range and protect the center head at all costs. Each head had its own brain that could attack at any time, even if the central head didn't notice the threat.

A species that lives in conditions so harsh it can only survive by having multiple heads...

“They say that dogs eat in order according to ranking. Let's make sure they remember to start with Cerve. Next is Orr, and then Ery.”

“Oh...r-ranking?” Cerve looked at the heads on either side of her own. Their tongues were hanging out, dripping drool. “Orr and Ery are both part of my body. We've always lived together. They're like family, dude. I can't just rank them like that.”

“Listen, Cerve.” Glenn looked directly into her eyes. “I believe the reason Orr and Ery are always fighting is because they're trying to establish which of them is more dominant. The literature I've read says that when the three heads of a Cerberus cooperate fully, they're remarkable in combat and can survive even the harshest environment. In

dogs, such cooperation requires establishing a clear hierarchy.”

“B-but I’m not a dog. I’m a Cerberus!”

“Yes, but the heads on your shoulders exhibit behavior traits extremely similar to dogs. If they establish who’s in charge, they’ll stop fighting.”

“B-but I...”

Cerve looked as if she was about to cry.

Glenn took another bite of bread. “I thought you said you’d follow my instructions.”

“U-uhh...you’re right, dude! I have to do this!”

Cerve shook her head, then cut some meat. When she opened her mouth to take a bite, Glenn could see her sharp canines.

“Mm, nom nom...” she chewed and swallowed. “Okay, next it’s Orr’s turn!”

She cut off another piece and fed it to Orr, who had his mouth open wide, waiting.

“Grrr!”

Seeing Orr fed first, Ery started growling.

“Err, s-sorry, Ery...”

“Don’t apologize. You need to teach them the hierarchy.”

Cerve already had tears in her eyes. “B-but...”

Ery whimpered in sympathy.

By contrast, after being assigned the higher rank, Orr regarded Ery with a look of pride. He barked, but Ery didn’t like this and responded by baring her teeth.

Cerve looked pained. “Ohhh...”

Glenn cocked his head, trying to figure out why she was finding it so difficult. This was the best treatment, and he needed her to follow it.

He continued eating, trying to remain calm. “Cerve, you need to be patient until they both learn.”

“I-I can do it!”

“Grrr...!”

“Arrrf...”

Glenn was oblivious to his patient’s distress, relying on his book knowledge alone.

He also didn’t notice the two upperclassmen staring him from another table. Both of them could tell that the young would-be doctor had a long way to go when it came to his bedside manner.

A week passed in this manner.

“How’s it going, Glenn? How’s Cerve?” Sapphee asked as Glenn read a book in her lab.

“There hasn’t been much change,” he admitted.

“Is that so?” Sapphee wouldn’t look him in the eye.

Glenn had buried himself in literature, searching for a solution, but there were no documented cases of Cerberii heads not getting along. The solution he’d come up with—to establish a hierarchy of authority of the heads—hadn’t produced any results.

“Shall I make you some herbal tea?” Sapphee asked.

“Y-yes, please.”

“Just a moment.”

Her lab included a coal stove for brewing medicines, which was also convenient for making tea. As she boiled the water, a strange smell filled the air.

She's not being...cold to me, exactly. But something's up.

At the Academy, Sapphee was gentle and kind, just as Glenn remembered her being in childhood. And yet, she still wouldn't meet his eyes. She was...distant, somehow. She was allowing him to use her lab freely while he tried to resolve Cerve's problem, so he didn't think she hated him... but still.

"I want some, yeah?"

"Okay, Lime. Get out of that bucket, then."

"Heh, it's just so comfy in here," Lime said, peeking her head out of the bucket she'd poured herself into.

Apparently, she liked to store herself in containers. Slimes behaved so differently from most organisms that it was sometimes hard to believe they were living creatures. She popped out of her bucket with a squish and returned to her human shape.

"Here you are. Glenn," Sapphee said. "So, what do you think? Can you help Cerve?"

"Yeah, umm."

Glenn sipped the herbal tea as he tried to come up with the right words. There had been no significant changes over the past week. He was working hard to train Cerve's shoulders into subordination, but it wasn't the same as training dogs. No matter what methods he tried, they soon started fighting again.

He'd set out intending to make Orr the second-ranking head, but whenever Orr was given priority, he provoked Ery.

Ery grew depressed when put last and snapped at Orr as he gloated.

“So...it’s not going well?”

“Er...”

Sapphee could see right through him.

“Are they really fighting over rank?” Lime asked.

At some point, a lemon had appeared in her herbal tea.

“I’m quite sure about it. Dogs don’t fight when there’s a hierarchy...”

“Hmm. But Cerve is a Cerberus, yeah?”

“Yes, but according to the literature—”

“Books are just books, yeah?” Lime pointed out.

Glenn wanted to protest, but he didn’t have any evidence to back up his words. The reality was that his methods had done nothing to resolve Cerve’s problem. Did that mean his hypothesis was wrong?

“Do *you* know what’s causing it, Lime?”

It was a childish retort. Even at fourteen, Glenn should have known better.

Lime just giggled. “No idea!”

“Then why—”

“But y’know, I can tell that your method isn’t right, yeah. I mean, Glenn, you just sit there staring at books instead of looking at Cerve.”

There was nothing he could do about her teasing. After all, she was an upperclassman.

“Huh?”

Flustered, Glenn closed the book he was scouring for information on the Cerberus species.

Now that he thought about it...was he really trying to force the text in the books to apply to Cerve? Had he decided from the start that this was a fight for hierarchy simply, because she looked like a dog?

"Ah, um, uh...sorry, I..."

"All you do is study, study, study. I mean, it's a good thing to study hard, yeah? But that won't turn you into a great doctor. Still, I'm sure it doesn't feel great to be told off like this by the worst student in Cthulhy's class!"

"N-no, that's not..."

"But the truth is, I've been with Dr. Cthulhy long enough that I *do* know some things, yeah! If she were here right now, she'd say, 'Neglect the patient, and you can't cure the curable. You only get ten points.'"

Lime's Cthulhy impression wasn't very good, but the words were spot-on.

"So, you've known each other a long time, then?"

"Yeah. I met Dr. Cthulhy when I lived by the coast."

Lime's pigtails moved with her in affirmation. Her "hair" showed more emotion than her limbs did. Nearly ninety percent of a slime's body was water. Therefore, many lived by oceans or lakes to maintain their required intake. By adjusting the osmotic pressure inside their body, they were able to absorb either freshwater or saltwater, and they could supposedly move around *in* water for short amounts of time. Glenn imagined they transformed their bodies to resemble jellyfish to do so.

Cerberii were a wonder, but slimes were something else altogether.

"Do you have any advice for Glenn, Sapphee?"

"Advice? Well..." Sapphee pondered as she drank her tea. "What do you think, Glenn? Do you think your diagnosis

is incorrect?”

“Y-yes I do...”

“In that case, start over. Think back to what Cerve said.”

Glenn thought about it again. “Cerve came to Sapphee’s lab because she was concerned that her grades were slipping. And her grades are slipping because the heads on her shoulders are fighting...”

No. Wait, was that right? The only reason Glenn thought the drop in her grades was caused by the fighting was because Cerve had said so.

“I wonder if that’s the truth?” he muttered to himself.

Sapphee and Lime looked at each other and smiled. Glenn was too busy working things out to notice them.

“Cerve controls most of their body. So...would her performance be affected by some spats between her shoulders?”

Lime’s hair bobbed up and down in anticipation. “What do you mean?”

“Could it be that they’re fighting *because* her grades are dropping?”

“Whaaaaa?” Lime said in a long, airheaded drawl. Although, it was true that slimes didn’t actually possess brains. “That’s an interesting perspective... why would her dogs fight over her grades, though?”

“I don’t know...but Cerve seems convinced that Orr and Ery are the cause of her poor results...”

Glenn went through it again. He pictured how Cerve looked, and how the two dog heads looked. When had they started fighting? Maybe the reason lay there. Cerve said she

didn't know what had changed. But even if she couldn't see it herself, maybe Glenn could figure it out.

"Glenn, can I give you one more piece of advice?"

"Huh? Oh, yes,"

Sapphee interrupted Glenn's thoughts just as he was about to go down another dead end in his mind. It was as if she knew where he was headed. Her smile was just as gentle as it had been back when they'd lived together. It was comforting.

"Cerve's three heads have individual brains, right?" she asked.

"Yes...at least, I think they do. It's precisely because the heads are independent that the Cerberii have been able to survive in such harsh environments."

"But that doesn't mean they aren't connected," Sapphee said. "Cerve called her heads 'family,' but they're even closer than that. They're all connected in one body... Orr, Ery, and Cerve. Don't forget that."

"Yes, I understand." Glenn nodded, finally getting it.

He'd been mistaken. Even if they had separate minds, the dogs on Cerve's body were part of her. Just as you could never rank one of your hands higher than the other, trying to establish an order between Orr and Ery would never work.

He needed to think of another way, and the materials were already in front of him. Glenn's head was spinning. The best-performing student at the Academy was about to use his brain to help Cerve.

Sapphee cleared her throat. "Ah, um...and also... Glenn?"

He looked at her quizzically.

"Umm... ahem..."

Was there something else he'd missed? For some reason, Lime was watching the two of them, grinning.

"Glenn...about me."

"Huh?"

Sapphee thumped her tail loudly. Glenn couldn't gauge her mood. Was it bashfulness? Frustration?

"I-I don't like being treated as a senior... just talk to me like normal!" she blurted out.

"Ahh, r-right!" Glenn stammered.

He'd intended to be respectful, but it seemed to have had the opposite effect.

Could it be...

He thought back.

Did my actions cause Sapphee to act so cold?

He'd thought that she was avoiding him. But maybe *he* was the one who'd put up a wall to keep her out. Maybe that was why it had felt like they'd grown apart?

How could he still be so bad at interacting with people? He still didn't have any friends at the Academy...but didn't that mean that he should be trying even harder to fix his relationship with Sapphee?

"O-okay I understa—I mean...I got it, Sapphee."

"Y-yes. I look forward to getting to know you again. Ahh, I was waiting to say that..."

They laughed awkwardly together. At least they'd narrowed the distance between them a bit. Lime looked on, laughing.

To an outside observer, it might have seemed like she was scheming, but Glenn was far too happy about

reconnecting with his childhood friend to notice Lime's expression.

The Nemea Academy campus maintained a massive field where the athletics department held their competitions, but the other students were allowed to use it as well. Glenn was trying to do something he was very bad at: he was going for a run.

"Oomf!"

"Woof!"

"Ruff!"

He could hear three distinct voices behind him.

"Haah... ahh..."

They'd run three long laps around the track, and Glenn was thoroughly out of breath. Behind him, however, Cerve showed no signs of being winded.

"Woof woof! Glenn, this is so fun, dude! I want to run more!"

"M-more... okay, I'll do my best!"

Glenn's face was pale, but he kept going.

Cerve was running on all fours. She normally walked on two, but the nature of her joints allowed to switch to being quadrupedal when she wanted. Many beast-kin monsters had similar joints, and preferred to run on all fours when traveling at speed. However, it did put a strain on their lower backs.

What's more, Cerve had a collar around her neck. The collar was attached to a leash, and Glenn was holding tight

to the other end. It was like something a wealthy family might use to walk their family pet.

I wonder if I should be doing this to an upperclassman...

But Cerve didn't seem to mind. The way she kept her mouth open to breathe as she ran made her look even more like a dog. She came up to him and sat, waiting for his instructions. She was behaving like he was her owner.

It's okay, this is treatment...it's just treatment... Glenn tried to convince himself.

Even though they had separate brains, Cerve, Orr, and Ery shared the same flesh. Even though their minds were distinct, they were all the same Cerberus. You couldn't create a hierarchy within a single being.

"Ahh, haa...whoo!"

"Woof, woof, woof!"

Glenn continued around the track, trying to stay ahead of Cerve, who followed him, barking the whole way. She was in a good mood. And there was no sign of Orr and Ery fighting on her shoulders. All three of them were completely absorbed in their exercise.

Cerve had thought her grades had dropped because of Orr and Ery's fighting. Sapphee had disagreed. If the cause and effect were reversed...then they'd been fighting *because* her grades dropped.

Orr and Ery have their own brains...but they share the same nervous systems.

Cerve was a scholarship student, which meant she was under additional pressure. Whatever initial, trivial reason had caused her grades to slip, the mental burden would have increased in tandem. It was only natural that Orr and Ery felt the same pressure.

The left and right heads naturally try to protect the head in the middle. If Cerve hadn't consciously identified the source of her stress, Orr and Ery would have no idea what was causing it.

From Orr and Ery's perspective, there was no obvious enemy. Nothing was attacking them, but *something* was putting stress on their system. As a result, they'd instinctively bared their fangs at the first thing they laid eyes on—the head on the other side of Cerve's—not realizing that they were blaming another part of themselves.

So, the two heads would fight whenever Cerve was feeling stressed.

No wonder there were no documented records of this happening before. In their natural habitat, Cerberii would never be pushed to this kind of breaking point. There would be plenty of outside enemies for them to focus on. Cerve's case came about as a direct result of her living in peace, without more pressing issues of survival to contend with.

Glenn was completely out of breath. "Ahh, haa...haa."

"Ha ha! More, Glenn! I want *more*, dude!"

"I-I'm sorry...I need a break."

Cerve's initial problem with her grades was probably just a slump. She might understand this if he told her, but the pressure of her poor performance was already hurting her. As such, Glenn had decided to focus on reducing her stress.

He figured that exercise unrelated to her grades—and with a new companion—would help her let off some steam.

"Woof...woof! Ha ha ha... ha!"

For some reason, Cerve had made Glenn hold the lead connected to her collar. She'd told him that she needed it when she ran with someone. He wondered if it was a

Cerberus tradition? There was still so much about the many monster cultures that he didn't understand.

Cerve was panting, but her eyes were shining.

I hope she feels a little better now.

At the very least, Cerve's shoulders weren't fighting. Even going on this brief jog seemed good for her. She could probably resume running regularly from now on.

"Um...Cerve?"

"Woof?"

"I'm sorry... I put you through a lot this week. It seems my diagnosis was wrong. There wasn't really any point to trying to establish an order."

"Oh, that?" Cerve laughed. "It was tough, and I didn't get it. But look, now we're running together! Don't worry, dude! See? Orr and Ery are happy, too!"

One side barked, as if they had forgotten what Glenn had put them through, too. The truth was, they probably *didn't* remember. Even though each shoulder had its own brain, they didn't have much in the way of long-term memory. That was the role of the central head.

"Thank you very much..."

Mistaken diagnoses could have serious consequences. Even if he wasn't a doctor yet, he'd been responsible for treating Cerve. Glenn vowed to never be overconfident in his own judgment in the future, and to think of the patient first. He would let this failure be a lesson for the future.

"Shall we go around one more time, Cerve?"

"Woof! Yes! Thanks, Glenn dude!"

It was tough to keep up with Cerve when she ran on four legs, even though she probably wasn't going at even half her full speed. But when Glenn tried to run again...

“Whoaa?!”

The ground suddenly rose to meet him. He’d pulled a muscle in his leg and tumbled forward, falling flat on his face.

“Agh, owww!”

“Glenn?!”

Luckily, only Cerve was present to witness him faceplant. He would have been pretty depressed if Sapphee had seen it happen.

“A-are you okay?” Cerve asked, helping him up. “Ohh! Your face is all scraped up!”

“Ah, I-I’m fine. It’s nothing.”

Glenn could feel her breath on his skin. It didn’t help that she was a beautiful and charming upperclassman. The only other girls Glenn had been around were his sister and Sapphee.

He absentmindedly wiped his cheek, and his hand came away bloody.

“It’s not fine! If a scrape like that gets infected, it can be dangerous! As a medical student, you should know that!”

“Well, yeah, but—”

Slurp.

Cerve suddenly started licking Glenn’s cheek.

He tried to resist.

“Oh, don’t move, dude! I’ll disinfect it right away.”

“Huh? Aggh...!”

Slurrrrp.

Cerve’s ran her tongue over Glenn’s scrape. She was holding his face with both of her hands and her fingers had pads like a dog’s, helping to hold him in place.

Slurp, slurrrp.

Glenn tried to back away. "O-okay, that's enough!"

Cerve's licking was intense. At this rate, his entire face would be covered in her slobber.

"No! It's not enough! I need to lick more!"

Slurp, slurrrp.

"Ugh, aggh..."

Dogs used their tongues to show affection. Perhaps this persistent licking wasn't just to disinfect his wound, but also to express her gratitude. Glenn thought it was a little excessive, but his strength was no match for hers. Cerve moved on from his cheek to his nose, his mouth, and even his eyeball.

Slurp! Smack!

"Ergh...!"

Glenn's voice didn't seem to be working.

He wished someone would come to his rescue, but very few students used the athletic grounds at this time of night. In fact, he'd chosen this time precisely because there wouldn't be any other students around.

"Mmm, mmm!"

Slurrrp, slurp!

"Ugh... Ahhh!"

Glenn looked around desperately for someone to help him.



Just then, he saw white scales out of the corner of his eye.

"I was starting to get worried." Sapphee said, appearing out of nowhere. Her expression was ice-cold—far more serious than he'd seen her since they'd been reunited. "Exactly what is going on here, Glenn?"

Glenn wanted to tell her that he'd fallen, but he couldn't do anything as long as Cerve kept licking him.

"First of all, get away from him."

"Wh-what?!"

Sapphee pulled Cerve away, bringing the Cerberus, who'd apparently been completely lost in her licking, back to reality.

"Now, explain yourself, Glenn!" Sapphee said, with the sweetest smile painted on her face.

"I just fell down..."

Covered in Cerve's saliva, Glenn did his best to explain.

He'd thought helping Cerve would just be a practice shot at consultation. He'd never expected it to turn into something so intense. It was only now that Glenn finally understood the meaning of the phrase: *"the extraordinary path to becoming a doctor."*

"Ouch..." Glenn moaned.

This time, the pain was muscle soreness. He usually spent all his time stuck behind a desk, studying. It shouldn't have been a surprise that his body was screaming after

trying to keep up with the top student in the athletics department.

“Glenn, go rest.”

“Thank you very much...Lime.”

“It’s nothing.”

Glenn was collapsed shirtless on the sofa in Sapphee’s lab. Well, it wasn’t actually a sofa, but Lime’s transformed body. The elasticity of her gel-like flesh was perfectly suited to support Glenn as he lay face-down.

“Ahh, this feels good.”

“Heh heh! I’m a slime that turns humans into mush! Don’t complain if you get addicted to me, yeah?”

Glenn was surprised by her malleability. Slimes could change the density and salt content of their flesh using osmotic pressure, which allowed her to turn herself into a Lime sofa for him to collapse into...and also cradle every part of his body as his muscles slowly relaxed.

“What happened to Cerve after that?” Sapphee asked.

“Too cold!” Glenn shouted, as Sapphee laid a compress on his back. He’d exercised with Cerve several more times after that first outing, which was why his muscles were in such severe pain. “S-Sapphee, not so rough.”

“Stop complaining. Now, what about Cerve?”

“Ah, well...it seems her grades have gone back to where they were before. She regained her confidence, and she hasn’t said anything about the dog heads on her shoulders fighting since.”

“So, your diagnosis was correct, then? Although...I still don’t understand why your face needed to be licked.”

“I already explained that...”

Apparently, Sapphee was still annoyed. Glenn wondered why she got so worked up over Cerve licking his face, but had no problem with him laying, half-naked, on Lime. He couldn't fathom her criteria.

"I also question your judgment. Running so much that your entire body is sore... what were you thinking?"

"I had to!"

Glenn moaned again. He'd known that the exercise would be too much.

But still...

He'd wanted to follow through. If he wished become a doctor, he couldn't let Cerve down. It was that simple.

"Ugh, whatever," Sapphee growled. "I've applied all your compresses, so just stay still for a bit. You're forbidden from studying, understand?"

"Yes, Miss—er, Sapphee."

"Good," she laughed.

Sapphee didn't want to be treated as his senior, but she sure was treating him like her junior. If he'd had an older sister, he was sure it'd be the same way. In fact, Sapphee had been more of a sister to him than his real siblings. It hadn't changed after all these years either. That made Glenn happier than anything.

"By the way, Glenn. Have you decided what to do about your lab? Cthulhy told you to choose, right?" Sapphee asked.

He'd been too preoccupied with Cerve. "Ah, yeah... I'm still thinking."

"If you'd like..." Sapphee sounded bashful. "If you're not against it, you could join me in my pharmaceutical lab. I mean, as one opti—"

"I'm here, dude!"

The door to the laboratory opened, and Cerve walked in. Sapphee seemed taken aback at this interruption.

"C-Cerve, what are you doing here?!"

"Heh heh, I was going to ask Master... just kidding! I was going to ask Glenn to brush me, dude!"

For some reason, Cerve had taken to calling him Master. He was glad Cerve looking so upbeat, but didn't understand why the treatment had made her grow so attached to him. Why couldn't she brush herself?

"As you can see, Glenn is exhausted. Please leave him alone."

"What?! Glenn, are you sick, dude?!"

"He's sore from running with you!" Sapphee shouted.

Cerve just chuckled. Was that normal, in this situation?

Glenn reluctantly stood up from his Lime sofa and put on a tunic. "It's fine, I'll do it. But just for a little."

Cerve sat at his feet, and he began brushing her hair.

"Mmm, woof, mmm!"

Cerve let out a coquettish bark. He kept brushing. Cerberus fur was stiff, and it tangled easily, forming knots and picking up dust. Cerberii generally used grooming as an expression of affection between close friends or relatives—Cerve probably didn't have anyone she could ask for help with this at the Academy.

For his part, Glenn also felt a sense of affinity with her.

"Ah, mm, oh, mmm! Glenn, you're good...dude."

"Yes. Please hold still."

"W-woof!"

Cerve's tongue lolled. It wasn't just Cerberii: all canines used their tongues to regulate body temperature.

"Mmm, oh, w-woof!"

"Okay, now your shoulders."

Cerve's shoulders twitched. "Mmm, ooh!"

Glenn moved over to the dog heads. They had the same relaxed expression as Cerve and seemed to trust Glenn with the brush.

"Mmm, oh, oooh, woof...mm!"

Cerve was drooling now, but Glenn was too busy with the brush to pay this any mind.

"Sapphee!" Lime whispered into the lamia's ear. She'd returned to her human form. "Aren't they getting a little too close? It looks like Cerve has feelings for him..."

"I don't know...I'm pretty sure Glenn doesn't have much experience with that sort of thing."

"Do you think...it's a talent he was born with, yeah?"

"Well, there is no arguing that he has a knack for making monsters relax around him."

Half-surprised and half-disgusted, the two upperclassmen watched as Glenn brushed Cerve's fur. He was firm but gentle.

"Mmm! Oh, agh! Mm, oh!"

"Ahh... Cerve, don't you think that's enough?" Sapphee asked, thumping her tail on the ground. "How long do you plan on taking advantage of Glenn's kindness? He already solved your problem, right? Do you really have to keep coming back?"

"Mmff, mmwoof! Ah, oh, uh, what?"

"I said, you don't need to bother Glenn just for brush—"

“B-but he said I could consult him anytime. Didn’t you start something new?”

“What?”

Sapphee had no idea what she was talking about, and Glenn was just as confused.

Cerve abruptly ran from the room, returning moments later with an object in her hands. It was the sign from outside Sapphee’s pharmaceutical laboratory. However, it had clearly been written over.

The new text read: *Feel free to consult us about your problems. Laboratory of Sapphee, Lime, and Glenn. Medical Department.*

Sapphee look puzzled. “What...is this?”

It was Glenn’s first time seeing the sign as well. When he’d come in this morning, he was sure the sign had read, *Sapphee’s Pharmaceutical Laboratory*. Why had it changed?

“Lime!” Sapphee cried angrily.

“Heh heh!” the green slime laughed, scratching her head.

And that was how Glenn came to join Sapphee’s laboratory.

Study 02: The Doll with Arthrosis

Let's return to the present for a moment.

"I was so surprised. I couldn't believe you just changed the sign without saying anything!"

"Heh heh. Sorry, yeah!"

"As if apologizing is going to... well, it doesn't matter now," Sapphee said, letting out a breath. "At any rate, that was how the three of us—you, me, and Glenn—started doing consultations."

Lime laughed, her elbows resting on the table. "It was so fun, yeah."

Sapphee didn't find it quite as amusing. After all, Glenn had forgotten all about it. Lime had to know why, and yet, she laughed as if it didn't matter. Sapphee didn't know if she could do the same in her place.

"Why *did* you change the sign?"

"Uh, well, Glenn's performance in the classroom really stood out, and...I thought it would be a good chance for him to get to know everyone, yeah."

"I see..."

Once the fuss over Cerve ended, Sapphee had planned to invite Glenn to join her lab...mostly so he didn't have to be alone. Lime had the same idea, but she was thinking further ahead. She was trying to help Glenn fit in at the Academy *and* in the classroom.

“Of course, we ended up with a reputation as medical students who’d treat any problems students had...”

“Heh heh! Good thing I spread those rumors!”

Sapphee was growing exasperated. “That was you, too?”

News of their lab spread fast and the patients were soon lining up. Glenn, the medical prodigy, had treated the work like a residency at a hospital, even though it was nothing more than a student-led lab. Any truly serious afflictions or symptoms were passed on to Cthulhy immediately, and even simple treatment was only provided at the discretion of the patient, who was responsible for any resulting complications. But that didn’t stop a steady stream of students from coming in with minor concerns.

“*Glenn* certainly earned a reputation,” Sapphee said.

“Well, he was the only human student in a school full of monsters, yeah.”

It was easy to go back to reminiscing about their school days.

“Remember that one patient?” Lime asked.

Sapphee remembered them quite clearly. That patient’s footsteps still echoed in her memory.

As a student, Glenn was always exhausted.

“I can’t believe Dr. Cthulhy gave us permission to do this...”

“Good thing I went to her directly to ask, yeah?”

“What?”

Lime was massaging Glenn's shoulders. He'd wondered how well she'd be able to massage with such squishy arms, but the elastic force of her hands was surprisingly effective.

Cthulhy had accepted their application to change the focus of the lab right away. And, even though they were still students, they'd received permission to perform certain medical procedures. She'd also certified Glenn to provide some examinations.

"My, my...your muscles are tight."

"Whose fault do you think that is?" Sapphee asked, glaring at Lime.

"Heh, sorry, yeah."

"The lab's getting at least one patient a day. More on busy days. Most are minor complaints—lower back pain, shoulder pain, immobile tail, wing stiffness... but Glenn has a reputation to live up to now, on top of the classes he's taking. It's too much!"

"Sapphee, you sound like a meddlesome aunt, yeah?" Lime teased.

Sapphee was livid. "We're practically the same age!"

Of course, she *was* concerned about Glenn. He was doing the work of a hospital resident while still balancing a full class load. No wonder he was so tired. For his part, Glenn was glad his reputation was growing and that people felt they could rely on him. But there was a limit to what he could do as a student. Sapphee and Lime were doing their best to help, but they had their limits, too.

"Well, I'll make sure that he keeps up with his studies. Leave it to me, yeah!"

"Lime," said Glenn. "Didn't you get an F on last month's quiz?"

"Ugh."

Glenn must have struck a nerve, because Lime bent over backward at an angle that would have been impossible for a human. Then she went even further, twisting her torso to look at Sapphee from the other direction.

“Okay. Then you’ll have to teach him, big sister.”

“Where do you get off calling me big sis—oh.”

Just then, there was a polite knock at the door.

“Excuse me,” a calm voice said. Her footsteps were stiff as she entered the lab, making a clanking, rhythmic sound. “I’m sorry, is this the lab that examines monsters?”

“Umm, and you are?”

The girl standing before them had long hair. She was wearing a French maid’s outfit, which probably made her a servant of one of the students or teachers—not unheard of on campus, but also not common. That was when Glenn noticed the groove at her elbow joint, which seemed to wrap all the way around, like a ball-jointed doll.

She must be...

The visitor bowed deeply. “Allow me to introduce myself. I serve as the secretary to Dr. Draconia, head of the sorcery department. My name is Bellmer. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“Th-the sorcery department?”

Glenn was astounded. He didn’t realize that news of their lab had spread so far.

Bellmer stared at Glenn with her unblinking eyes.

“N-nice to meet you. I’m Glenn.”

“Likewise. You are young, but you have a promising future.”

Glenn laughed nervously. He’d never seen anything like the maid-like creature sitting in the chair in front of him. Her body was humanoid, but it was made up of multiple distinct parts, articulated together. He didn’t know much about sorcery, but if he had to guess, she might be a kind of magicked marionette.

She had accessories, like the bobbins of a sewing machine, on her head... wait, no, those weren’t for decoration. There were thin strings wrapped around the bobbins, connecting them to Bellmer’s wrists. To all of her limbs, in fact. But Glenn still couldn’t tell how they worked.

What he *could* tell was that she had a beautiful face. It wasn’t a natural beauty, but a manufactured one. Whoever had made her must have been a talented craftsman. Her eyes looked like glass beads—come to think of it, they probably *were*—and they were currently staring at Glenn.

“Miss Bellmer, can I ask you something?”

“Of course you can, Saphentite.”

“I’ve heard that the sorcery department doesn’t interact much with other departments... how did you hear about our lab?”

“I was created to deal with the outside world. That’s how I found out about this lab.”

Glenn cocked his head at this strange wording. “The outside world...”

Bellmer nodded. “Yes. Normally, there’s a clear boundary drawn between the pursuit of the arcane arts and the methodology of other departments. Dr. Draconia has maintained such a boundary since the Nemea Academy was first established, ordering the students to avoid fraternizing

with outsiders. Apparently, Dr. Cthulhy calls us the Grim Hermit Department,” she said casually.

“I apologize for my mentor...” Glenn said.

“Why would you apologize? She states the facts directly. That is wonderful.”

Bellmer seemed genuinely perplexed by Glenn’s apology. She cocked her head to the side in a way that was cute at first, but then she kept going, till her head was tilted at an unnatural angle. If she was anyone else, Glenn would have suspected a broken spine.

“However, though isolationism might be the sorcery department’s official policy, we are still a part of the Academy. We cannot function without *any* contact with the outside world. Hence, Dr. Draconia created me to take handle certain tasks.”

“I-I see... so that’s how you learned of the lab, then.”

Bellmer nodded. “My main tasks are shopping, drafting departmental paperwork, and conducting negotiations with the heads of other departments. Although, I don’t usually deal with the medical department.”

“O-oh.”

“I have been having an issue for some time now. However, I was unable to find an appropriate solution. I heard about this lab by chance, but once I absorbed the rumors, I determined that Glenn would be the optimal person to consult.”

“Th-thank you so much...”

Glenn glanced over at Lime. She was silently sticking out her tongue and winking at him, as if to say, “See what my rumor-spreading skills can do? Go ahead and praise me, yeah!” She looked exceedingly proud of herself.

“Now then, what is your issue?”

“My joints are in pain.” Bellmer lifted her arm. “Is there any way you can examine me, Mr. Glenn?”

Glenn groaned. Consultations had been Lime’s idea. She hadn’t even asked them before advertising those kinds of services. If he’d put his foot down, he could have bowed out and joined a lab with an easier workload, but it was too late for that now. Of course, he enjoyed being in the same lab as Sapphee, and Lime did her part to help them out.

It was nice to feel like he belonged, but there was a more important reason he’d stayed. Glenn wanted to examine monsters’ bodies in practical situations. Real contact would teach him much more than just reading textbooks, and giving consultations was the perfect way to glean such experience. He’d already examined a number of monsters and was certain the valuable experience would help improve his grades even further. But the doll in front of him was an entirely different kettle of fish. She hadn’t been born in the normal, biological sense, but manufactured. Could he really diagnose her through examination? Was this an additional opportunity to gain experience, or was it too much for him to handle? He’d studied living monsters, but never even seen a magic doll...

“Excuse me. May I speak to you for a moment?”

“Anything you like, Miss Saphentite.”

“Miss Bellmer, you are a doll brought to life by Dr. Draconia’s magic, correct? Wouldn’t it make more sense for her to examine you, rather than one of us? Perhaps your master would know better—”

“No. My master said there is nothing wrong with me.”

Bellmer lifted her arm again. As she did, one of the bobbins on the top of her head rotated, winding the thread connected to her arm. Glenn could see now that the threads connected each part of her body and assisted her

movements. As a doll with no muscles, the strings allowed her to move in defiance of gravity.

“My master has the utmost confidence in her own sorcery. It is not arrogance, but experience. My master heard my complaints and conducted an inspection, examining every part of my body. Her conclusion was that there were no problems.”

Glenn groaned. He'd never met the head of the sorcery department, but he'd heard of her. She was a practitioner of old magic, whose unbroken traditions had been passed down since ancient times. She was invited to the Nemea Academy to address the need for such knowledge in the new era.

However, Glenn's issue wasn't with her history. It had to do with his mentor, Cthulhy, and her relationship to Draconia...

“I was debating whether or not to ask Dr. Cthulhy,” said Bellmer.

“Is that so? Why didn't you? Dr. Cthulhy is quite knowledgeable...”

“True, but our masters fight like cats and dogs. Actually, it might be more accurate to say they fight like alligators and octopi. Neither of them would be happy if I did so.”

Glenn held his head in his hands. “You're right...”

Cthulhy's department was founded on the principles of science: universal logic and replicable results. Draconia's department, however, was shrouded in secrecy, and its principles could only be replicated by those with a special ability. The two fields were opposed in every way: from inception, to development, and even methodology. Cthulhy rejected sorcery as nonscientific and Glenn didn't know

what Draconia thought of medicine, but he imagined her views were likewise incompatible.

Their rivalry was famous throughout the Academy.

"I *could* ask Dr. Cthulhy to examine me," said Bellmer. "But if Master were to find out, she would be furious. She would say: 'What is that octopus doing with my adorable doll?' I do not wish for that to happen."

"O-oh."

"For I *am* her adorable doll," Bellmer said casually.

Glenn was beginning to understand her. Bellmer might have been brought to life by magic, but she also had self-awareness. She had her own thoughts, her own will, and she was *choosing* to act according to Draconia's wishes. In other words...

"That's why you came to me."

"Yes."

"I see..."

Glenn didn't know anything about sorcery. Bellmer, in turn, probably had no frame of understanding for the biology, pathology, immunology, or anything else that he was studying.

Sapphee seemed worried. "What are you going to do?"

Glenn thought for a moment. "I would be happy to examine you."

Lime tilted her head to the side, pigtails bouncing. "Glenn, are you sure, yeah?"

He might lack an understanding of Bellmer's anatomy, but the same applied to his knowledge of slime biology, for instance. When Glenn thought of it that way, he was sure he could help the doll somehow.

"I'm still a student, so I can't promise that I will know what to do."

Bellmer bowed her head. "Of course. Thank you very much, Mr. Glenn."

The bobbins on her head spun ever so slightly when she moved. With each rotation, there was the sound of winding string.

"Miss Bellmer...our policy is that if an examination uncovers something beyond our ability to treat, we must go straight to Dr. Cthulhy to ask for help. Can you agree to that?"

"That is fine. If that happens, I will deal with Dr. Draconia," Bellmer said.

"Now then." Glenn stood up from his chair. "Miss Bellmer, please let me start by taking you apart."

"All right, Mr. Glenn."

Anyone else would have been shocked at that, but Bellmer simply nodded, as if it was completely normal.

Bellmer lay on the cot set up in the lab. She'd removed her maid's outfit, and showed no embarrassment at being naked in front of them. Her white ceramic body was humanoid in shape, but lacked details such as nipples, navel, genitals, or other organs. The seams that covered Bellmer's entire body, and the ball-and-socket joints in her elbows and knees, further emphasized her nonhuman nature.

Glenn could appreciate the skill that had gone into crafting her. There was an ancient myth about a man who

fell in love with the statue of a woman he'd made. Strange as it might seem, Glenn found Bellmer's naked body so beautiful that he finally understood how the man in the myth must have felt.

"Now then," Bellmer said.

The bobbins on her head spun, and her entire body loosened, her limbs scattering. One after another, her parts came undone, starting with her hands, her forearms, her elbows, then her upper arms. As they relaxed, the thick string that ran through them became visible. It seemed to be coated with sparkling particles.

"Whoa!"

Lime reached out to keep Bellmer's legs from falling off the cot, even as her feet, calves, knees, and thighs separated.

"Glenn, I have a request," Bellmer said.

"Y-yes?"

"Can you please hold my head still?"

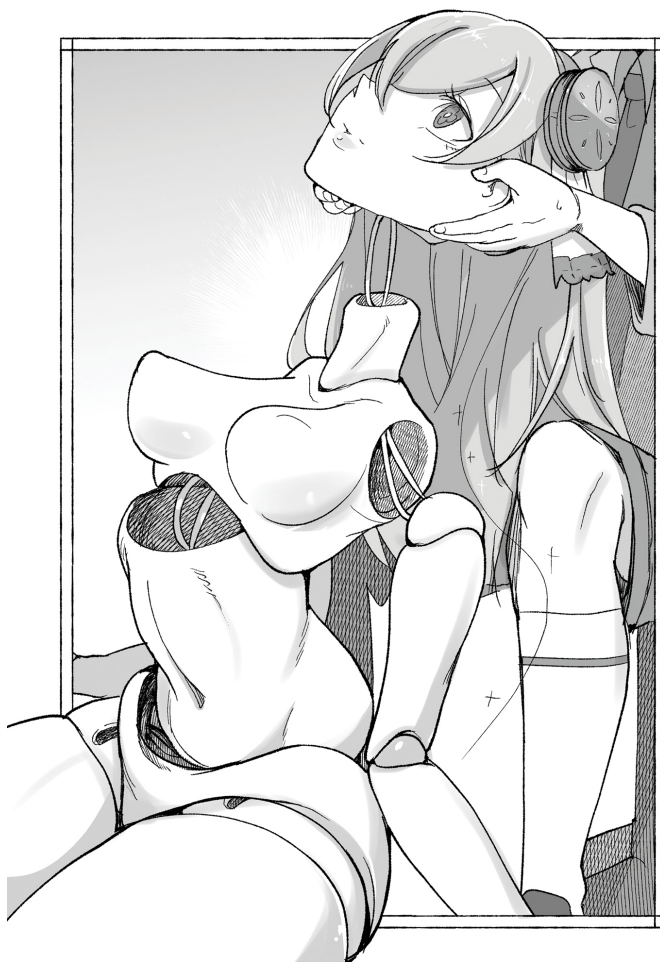
"O-okay." Glenn did as Bellmer asked. Her head was quite heavy, but still lighter than a human head. He guessed it was empty inside. The weight probably came from the ceramic. The bobbins on top were still spinning.

"Excuse me."

Bellmer's torso loosened, splitting into three parts—waist, abdomen, and chest.

"Whoa?!"

Her head also separated from her torso, leaving only sparkling string in between. Bellmer's head remained intact, cupped in Glenn's hands.



"I have now separated all my parts," said Bellmer's freshly-severed head.

She seemed completely unaffected by the fact that her body was in pieces.

"Th-that caught me off-guard."

"Please don't drop me. My body is essentially made of ceramic. If I crack, I have to be remolded from clay and re-fired."

The strings that extended from her head looked exactly like nerve ganglia, connecting all the parts of her body. Other than that, she was structured like any other ball-jointed doll. Sapphee brought a cushion, and Glenn set Bellmer's head on it.

"Thank you very much. Now, please begin the examination, Mr. Glenn."

"R-right..."

Glenn told himself to remain professional. There were rare species of monsters whose heads could separate from their torsos, such as the Dullahan. If he thought of her like one of those, then there was nothing strange about it.

He started to remove the string running through her hands and feet. Each segment of her body was hollow, with internal hooks to hold the strings in place. It was a complex system, using tensile strength to allow movement, but with Bellmer's instruction, he was able to unhook the threads. The ceramic itself was exquisitely shaped, speaking to the skill of the maker.

"You really are impeccably crafted."

"Yes. My master employed the top dollmaker in Nemea."

"Oh, Dr. Draconia didn't assemble you herself?"

“No. My master simply cast the spell that allows me to move. She created a cute, attractive doll personality for me. That is to say, she made me Bellmer.”

“Cute and attractive...”

Glenn couldn't say just how attractive she was with all her parts spread out like this.

“Master's sorcery is in the strings. They hold my entire body together, allowing it to move, to record and convey information. In other words, they make me who I am.”

“I see...so you move using the strings.”

When Glenn looked at each of her components, he could tell there was more to them than ceramic. Naturally, Bellmer had no bones, muscles, nerves. But apparently she did feel pain, so something had to be amiss. Pain was a safety mechanism. Without it, people wouldn't notice when they were injured or sick. If Bellmer was in pain, it meant her body had detected something out of place.

Glenn studied the places where her segments met. All of her joints were intact...ankles, knees, elbows, wrists, shoulders, and hips.

“Hmmm...”

As far as he could tell, nothing was wrong. If there had been a foreign object lodged somewhere, he would have seen it right away. Nor were there any cracks or deformities in the ceramic. Her limbs were pristine.

“Do you mind if I take a look at your head?”

“Please.”

Her head truly was a work of art. Even though it was made of ceramic, her lips looked soft, and she even had eyelashes. It was possible those parts were made from rubber and human hair. Her unblinking eyes, which seemed to be made of glass, were still staring at him.

“Unh...”

“Mr. Glenn?”

“N-no, it’s nothing.”

He brushed it off, flustered and embarrassed that he’d been staring for so long at her face, even if she was a doll. He averted his eyes, blushing.

“Argggh...!”

“Sapphee, down girl, yeah?”

Glenn was utterly oblivious to Sapphee’s jealousy.

“N-now then, let me look inside.”

“I understand—wha?!” Bellmer stalled, then let out a cute yelp.

Glenn had turned her head over and was examining the inside. It was hollow, like the rest. He could see the indentations for her eyeballs, as well as the metal bobbins—the key to Bellmer’s existence—which went all the way through her head.

“Thank you. I’ll put you back together now.”

“So...that’s enough?” she asked. “I tried to put on a charming performance for you. What did you think? Am I cute?”

“Er, err...”

Glenn wasn’t sure how to answer. He looked to Sapphee.

Sapphee’s expression said, “Don’t ask me.” Her tail thumped against the floor.

“I-I would like to discuss the results of my examination,” Bellmer said.

“Well...” Glenn took a deep breath. “There are no deformities in your joints. The holes your strings run through

are also intact. It seems there's nothing wrong physically with you..."

"Does that mean there is another cause?"

Glenn pointed to the bobbins on Bellmer's head. "Personally, I think it might be your strings."

"My master told me there were no defects in her sorcery. The problem does not lie in the strings. I am sure of that."

"I see..." Glenn didn't know what to do. Sorcery was hardly his expertise, and he couldn't confirm or deny what she was saying. "Hmmm..."

"Hey, Miss Bellmer," Sapphee cut in. "Can you give us some time to think this over? Since your body is so different from a monster's, I think Glenn needs more time to process."

"Yes, of course. I mean no offense, but I did not expect an answer right away. I am not in a hurry."

The bobbins on Bellmer's head started to turn, and the sparkling strings threaded themselves back through the pieces of her body as if they had minds of their own. Once they reached her hands and feet, they started to retract, pulling the doll back together.

"Body reconstruction is complete. Thank you very much for your time today."

"Oh, not at all, I'm sorry I couldn't..." Glenn hated that he couldn't resolve her problem, but Bellmer's expression remained unchanged. "Hey, Miss Bellmer?"

The doll was silently putting her clothing back on. "I guess my body was not to Mr. Glenn's liking. Shall I increase my breast volume for next time?"

"That won't be necessary!" Sapphee slammed, whipping her tail across the ground.

Bellmer's chest was plenty large as it was.

"I see. Excuse me. I will be going now."

Bellmer finished dressing. Her clothing looked cumbersome, but she donned it all quickly, as if she was used to it. It was hard to believe she'd been a pile of doll parts only moments ago.

"I look forward to hearing your conclusion. Goodbye, everyone."

Bellmer left the room. Her demeanor hadn't changed in the slightest from the moment she'd entered.

After she was gone, Glenn let out a sigh. "What was that all about?"

"Glenn, can't you hold your head up straight? You keep turning it to the side, yeah?"

Lime copied his posture. Slimes were good at mimicking people, even minute gestures.

"Lime, stop fooling around and help me think."

"I *am* thinking! Umm, umm...joint pain is caused by moth holes!"

"I don't think bugs live in ceramic dolls, nor did I see any."

"Ohh..."

Glenn tapped his chin in thought. "It's got to be those strings that act as her nervous system. I'm sure they're the cause. Maybe there's a flaw in the magic?"

In Cerve's case, he'd been able to try a number of different approaches. However, Glenn couldn't use the same trial-and-error process with Bellmer. He was no expert on sorcery, and he certainly couldn't risk damaging her by tinkering. However, he couldn't think of another solution.

“Hee hee! So, there are things that Glenn doesn’t know, yeah?”

“Of course there are,” he said. “I’m not a doctor yet.”

Meanwhile, Sapphee was busy working on something else. She spread a cloth out in the corner and laid a large volume of dirt on top of it. She held a small trowel with her tail, using it to mix the soil. She was probably going to grow more herbs. Since her focus was on pharmacology, half her lab work consisted of cultivating and harvesting plants.

“Hey, Sapphee, do you have any ideas?” Lime called out.

“Sorry, medicine doesn’t work on dolls.” Sapphee didn’t look up. Her pharmaceutical skills were formidable—even Cthulhy said so—but in this case, her knowledge was useless. “Even if I were to prescribe painkillers, would she be able to take them?”

Glenn nodded. “You’re right. She doesn’t have normal nerves, so medicine probably wouldn’t be effective.”

Sapphee began mixing fertilizer into the soil, focusing on her work to hide her frustration.

“Hmmm...” Glenn absently touched his forehead, as he often did when he was stuck. “Hey!”

He looked at his finger and realized there was a powder-like substance all over his hand. It was the exact same color as his skin, so he’d only just noticed.

“What is this...powder?”

And where had it come from? He rubbed his fingers together, but he couldn’t tell what it was. It was odorless and didn’t seem to be dangerous.

“Glenn, what is it, yeah?”

“Oh, sorry. There’s something on my hand...”

He wondered if he'd touched something he shouldn't have, but he'd been in the lab all day. The only things he'd touched were the teacup Sapphee had given him, his books, and Bellmer's body.

"Is it possible...?"

Could this powder have come from the doll?

He hadn't noticed when he was touching her and, now that he looked closer, there wasn't *that* much on his hands. But maybe it had something to do with Bellmer's ailment.

"Hmm? Let me take a look, yeah?"

"Y-yes, here."

"Ji-i-i-i..."

Lime made a strange noise with her mouth as she looked at Glenn's fingers. For once, her big, round eyes stared right at him. He was reminded that, even if she was struggling a bit academically, she was still an aspiring medical professional. She'd worked under Cthulhy for a long time.

Chomp.

Just as Glenn was thinking this, Lime put his finger into her mouth.

"What the...?!" Sapphee cried out.

Glenn was rooted in place by the shock. Lime's slimy body tissue had a cool, squishy sensation.

Sapphee was trembling with anger. "L-Lime! What are you doing?! I haven't even done that with him!"

"S-settle down, Sapphee!" Glenn said.

If he didn't intervene, something tragic might happen. Sapphee stayed put, but brandished her trowel with her tail.

“Mmm...” Lime released Glenn’s finger with a smack.
“Hmm...what is this flavor? I know I’ve tasted it before.”

“Y-you know it?”

“Mmm. Well, I know the flavor of everything I’ve tasted, yeah?” Lime said casually.

Slimes were basically one giant digestive organ. They could absorb food from any part of their bodies, and could even control the rate of digestion, as evidenced by the pieces of rind floating inside Lime right now. Glenn hadn’t realized she possessed a sense of taste though.

“So what?! That doesn’t mean you need to put it in your mouth!” said Sapphee. “Isn’t your entire body a mouth?! Why did you have to put it in there?!”

“Stoop, no. I may like Glenn, but I would never do that...”

Sapphee waved the trowel around furiously. “That’s not what I’m saying!”

“Do you know what the substance is?!” Glenn asked, attempting to change the subject.

Lime pointed to the substance that Sapphee had been mixing. “Er, uh...it’s that!”

“Soil?”

“Yes! But not normal soil. Clay. And it tasted like it had been baked.” She licked her translucent lips. “Baked soil, yeah!”

Baked soil. In other words, ceramic. Bellmer was covered in powder from her own body. Once Glenn knew that, the rest came easily. They used a microscope to confirm Lime’s theory. Or rather, Sapphee did. Microscopes were very expensive, but the Academy prided itself on advanced education, so they had a few available for student use.

“There’s no doubt about it,” she said. “It’s soil with a high quartz content. When it’s fired, it hardens like metal. I think this kind of bisque, or biscuit porcelain, is often used to make dolls.”

Glenn was impressed with Sapphee’s knowledge. “Thank you...”

He was sure now. The powder on his hands was part of Bellmer’s body. When he went back to the place where they’d taken her apart, he found a light coating of the same powder on the cot.

“I’m glad you’re so skilled with a microscope, Sapphee,” he said.

“I have to be for composition analysis. You’ll need to learn how to use one, too.”

“Ah...I’ll try my best,” Glenn stammered, as he always did when Sapphee addressed him as her junior.

“Squish, squish... Glenn!”

While Glenn and Sapphee were talking, a green, slimy liquid seeped under the lab door. It crept over to Glenn and slowly gathering into Lime, her pigtails bouncing.

“Lime! Next time, open the door if you want to come in!”

Lime laughed, sticking out her tongue. “Heh heh, that’s too much work.”

The way she’d slithered in reminded Glenn of a horror novel that was currently popular in Nemea. It was the story of an amorphous being that terrorized the town.

Glenn shook his head. “Uh, umm... did you do what I asked, Lime?”

“Yes, yes. I got the rumor out there, just like you asked, yeah.” Lime’s face was serious. “I did some digging in the

sorcery department.”

“You really are well-connected.”

“Heh heh! I haven’t been in the medical department this long for nothing, yeah.” Lime grinned. “About Dr. Draconia... she really doesn’t come out often, yeah. But last year she showed up at a few gatherings and faculty meetings. Sometimes people see her out and about, walking with a cane.”

“Well, that makes sense,” Sapphee said. “No matter how much of a hermit she might be, you can’t run an entire department without ever setting foot outside.”

“But this year,” said Lime. “Suddenly we don’t see her anymore, yeah? I asked students in the sorcery department, and it seems she’s been even more of a hermit than before.”

Lime really was well-connected. Her carefree personality and easy familiarity probably made people comfortable around her. The Nemea Academy placed so much emphasis on grades that high-scoring underclassmen like Glenn were often shunned by other students, but not Lime. She didn’t care about anyone’s grades. The fact that she even *had* friends in the sorcery department, was something of a miracle in itself.

“No wonder I’ve never seen Dr. Draconia. It sounds like she went into deeper isolation just before I got here,” Glenn said.

“That sounds about right. Do you think this is related to Bellmer’s ailment?”

“Um, sorry. It’s not directly related.”

“Huh?! It’s not? I thought you’d come up with an amazing idea for treatment, and that’s why you wanted to know about Dr. Draconia!” said Sapphee.

"I-I'm sorry! I don't have a brilliant idea for a cure or anything..." Glenn's head drooped. "I... all I can do is try and address the symptoms. That's why I needed information about Draconia."

"That's fine," Sapphee said, still looking into the microscope. "We don't know the first thing about magic. All we can do is treat patients based on our experience and our knowledge of medical science. Bellmer came to us knowing that, right?"

"Y-yes, you're right."

"So just do what you can, Glenn."

It was true: Glenn couldn't use magic himself, but he might be able to treat a doll who'd been animated by it. In Cerve's case, he'd been looking at the entire problem wrong. But he was sure he could do better this time around.

"Hey Sapphee...you're starting to sound like Dr. Cthulhy, yeah?" said Lime.

"I-I am not."

"Really? The words you used were just like her..."

Sapphee looked askance. "Don't compare me to that lecherous old lady, please!"

The wheels in Glenn's head were spinning. What he'd just learned about Draconia had nothing to do with Bellmer's treatment, but he thought it important to get the whole picture, including what might have led Bellmer to come to him.

"Hey, Sapphee?"

"Hmm? What is it?"

"I thought about this when I was examining Cerve, but...a doctor's job isn't just to treat a patient's physical ailments. We have to tend to their emotions too, I think."

"Yes. You're right."

"But...where is Bellmer's soul?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, well, I have an idea of what she's thinking, but I don't know if that's what Bellmer feels in her *soul*. Maybe her feelings stem from Draconia. She did make her, after all."

The heart lives in the chest, and the brain lives in the head. But when he'd taken Bellmer apart, both her head and her chest were empty. Where did she keep her soul?

"The location of the soul is a philosophical issue, Glenn, not a medical one."

"Ah, yes, you're right..."

Even if Bellmer was made by Draconia, she'd come to the lab of her own volition. The *why* of it was what Glenn needed to solve.

"As a doctor, you need to focus on the facts. Also..." Sapphee glanced over at Lime. "Even amorphous beings who lack brains and hearts can have souls."

Lime's body quivered with indignance. "Wha?! You're making fun of me, yeah?! It sounded like you were calling me a lower form of life, yeah!"

"I said no such thing. But I do wonder where your soul is, Lime."

"Like I would know something like that! But I can say this." Lime put her hand to her chest. "There's no mistake that I'm the one who's here, doing this, yeah?"

"You're right..."

Just as Glenn was Glenn, Bellmer was Bellmer. Even if she'd been brought into existence using sorcery, Glenn

needed to accept that she had a soul and determine why she'd come to the lab in the first place.

He didn't know it at the time, but the brilliant doctor he'd become one day—the one who would earn the respect of Cthulhy, Sapphee, and so many others—was already beginning to emerge.

"How are you feeling, Bellmer?"

Several days passed before the doll came back to the lab. She sat in a chair, looking straight at him with unblinking eyes.

"There have been no changes."

"You're still in pain?"

"Like I said, there have been no changes."

It was just as Glenn had expected, since he'd been unable to solve her issue by disassembling her.

"I'd like to examine you again. Is that all right?"

Bellmer stood up and started to undress. "Yes. Allow me to disassemble myself."

"Oh, no. That's not what I meant," Glenn said. "Today I want to examine you with your parts intact, not separate."

"Examine me...put together?"

"Yes. I want to examine your strings."

Bellmer stood stiff, in a strange position, as if she trying to work out what he meant. The seemingly unstable posture made her look even less like a living being.

"What should I do?" she asked.

“I’m going to ask my senior classmate to assist me.”

Sapphee appeared, smiling, behind Bellmer. She touched the doll’s head.

“Ahhmm!” Bellmer let out a soft moan. “S-Saphentite, stop. Don’t touch the bobbins on my head...ahhmm.”

“I’m sorry, Bellmer. This is a necessary procedure.”

The doll’s face was expressionless, but she made a pained sound, and her body twitched. Sapphee ignored this, firmly turning the bobbins. Glenn hadn’t anticipated this reaction.

Sapphee continued cranking. “I’m going to turn them a bit more.”

“Mmm, oof, ahhhmm.” Bellmer squirmed.

Sapphee ignored her reactions.

Bellmer’s parts started to loosen. Her hand gradually emerged from the sleeve of her maid outfit, and Glenn took it in his. He could see the sparkling string connected to it.

“Are you all right, Miss Bellmer?”

“Ahh...mmm!”

“Please tell me if you feel pain.”

“I-It doesn’t hurt, but...that string is like an exposed nerve...mmm, ahhh!” Bellmer cried.

Glenn pulled her smooth, ceramic hand. The string changed color depending on the angle you looked at it. It was iridescent like a jeweled beetle or a soap bubble, but it wasn’t dyed, or painted. The molecular structure of the string itself that gave it that shine. He touched it gently.

“Ohhh,” Bellmer cried out.

She didn’t seem to be in pain when he touched them... although, she *was* squirming. Since her skin was ceramic,

she didn't blush, but her face had been painted to make it seem like she did.

As long as it doesn't hurt...

Glenn continued his examination. He touched the ball-joint that connected her forearm to her upper arm, feeling the powdery residue on its surface.

Baked soil.

"Mmm, ah, ohh... G-Glenn, even my master doesn't—ahh!"

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Bellmer pulled her hand away hastily. "Ahhmm."

"Glenn," Sapphee cautioned. "Let's palpate the patient without scaring her."

Glenn hung his head. "R-right..."

He let out a deep breath and turned back toward Bellmer.

"Miss Bellmer, about your symptoms."

"Y-yes?"

"I think the issue is with your strings, not your joints," Glenn explained.

"Th-that's impossible." He detected a hint, a very small hint, of dissatisfaction in her voice. "The strings are magic, made by my master. They aren't the problem."

"Oh, sorry. I should have phrased it differently. The strings themselves are fine."

"What does that mean?"

"Please, take a look." Glenn showed her his hand. "This is powder from your body, Bellmer. When we examined it under a microscope, we were able to identify it as the same

clay your body is made of. I believe this powder is a byproduct of friction between your component parts.”

“Friction?”

“Yes. In other words, you’re exerting excessive force on your joints.” It was wearing away at the edges of Bellmer’s joints, creating the powder. “I believe the bobbins on your head are the cause, since they maintain the tension.”

“You mean the force pulling my body together is too strong?”

“Correct.”

And hence, the pain. Even though the strings themselves were fine, Bellmer’s body had determined that it was in crisis, and begun transmitting pain signals.

“I think we should adjust the bobbins,” Glenn said.

“I understand. My body was made by hand, but these bobbins were ordered at a separate atelier. I will check if the manufacturer can fix them for me.”

Bellmer turned one of the bobbins on her head. This wound the string, and her hand drew back inside her maid outfit.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Glenn. Now I can report to Dr. Draconia.”

“Ah...w-wait, Miss Bellmer. I have more questions...”

Glenn still hadn’t brought up the critical issue, but before he could ask her, the lab door flew open.

“Who is toying with my adorable doll? Whoooo?!”

A monster stood in the doorway. She held a cane in one hand and was so small she could easily be mistaken for a child.

“What is the meaning of this?! You! You’re that octopod’s idiot apprentice, aren’t you?! I won’t forgive you

for laying hands on my precious Bellmer!”

“W-wait a second...!”

The monster started whacking Glenn with her cane. Even though she was gripping the cane in both hands, it didn’t hurt much. Evidently her wrists were quite weak. It almost looked like the cane was swinging her.

Actually...does she even have wrists?

She was wearing a school cap and glasses, as well as official Academy robes. A thick tail stuck out from under the hem, dragging along the ground. What he could see of her hands were covered in hard scales, with no obvious wrist joints. Her arms were the same thickness from elbow to hand.

Many monsters sported scales, but she also had something that looked like horns sprouting from her tail. Could it be...

A monster with alligator characteristics. A sobek? They were known for living in rivers, which they’d done since ancient times.

“Umm...would you happen to be Draconia?”

“A lowly student calling me by my last name?! I am the head of the sorcery department! You will call me by my *title!*”



Sobeks lived many years, and frequently shed their skin, so they often appeared younger than their real age, so it wasn't that strange Dr. Draconia looked like a child. What *was* strange was that she was acting like one.

Draconia puffed out her chest. "You will respect me, ingrate!"

Her robe was open and she wore nothing under it save for a cloth over her chest and another over her nethers, as if she'd wandered out in her pajamas. She seemed utterly unconcerned with her appearance.

"You're no monster. You're Cthulhy's new pet I keep hearing about. A human! And you have the audacity to toy with *my* doll?!"

"Er, uh, um... I was performing an exam..."

"Silence! Give her back to me! Giv'er back!"

She hit him with her cane again, but it still didn't hurt.

"Um, this is a laboratory," Sapphee cut in. "Please don't swing your cane..."

"Shut up! I don't remember giving the medical department permission to examine my doll! Bellmer is my greatest success!"

Sapphee frowned. Obviously, she was in no position to oppose Draconia, but then it's not like that was too much of a problem. After all she wasn't hitting any harder than a child.

"Er...uh... ouch."

Draconia stopped abruptly, and leaned on her cane again. It looked like she suffered from lower back pain.

"Master, are you all right?" Bellmer asked. "Please, lean on me."

"Ooh. Argh. Uhh. Sorry, my dear."

Bellmer rushed to Draconia's side. "I am yours, Master. Please, do not worry."

I wonder if she's working too hard...

Sitting in a chair for long periods of time could cause back pain. Glenn had heard that Draconia didn't go outside often, so perhaps lack of exercise was a contributing factor.

"W-would you like me to take a look?" Glenn asked. "If you're having lower back pain, I think I can help. Sapphee can make compresses for you. We could at least alleviate your symptoms."

"N-no!" Draconia screeched in a voice like crackling thunder. "I would never trust medicine! That octo-woman thinks she can ignore sorcery's ancient traditions?! I'm sure she taught you real good, apprentice! I have no intention of surrendering my body to such nonsense!"

"Master, Mr. Glenn is simply concerned for you! You don't have to—"

"We're leaving, Bellmer! Back to the sorcery department! I will be the one to take care of your ailments!"

Draconia turned on her heel and began tottering away on her cane. She looked livid.

"Ah..."

Glenn didn't know what to say. He'd already solved Bellmer's problem, but telling Draconia as much would almost certainly just incense her further. Besides, he was concerned about the sobek's health. He wanted to help her, but it seemed she hated medicine as much as Cthulhy hated sorcery.

"Look at you, Draconia. You're falling apart."

"Huh?!"

"Ugh!"

Glenn heard a familiar voice from the hall. He rushed outside to find a beautiful, lab-coat-wearing woman with eight tentacled legs.

“D-Dr. Cthulhy?!” Draconia stammered. “What are you doing here?”

“Why, I was summoned, of course. By my adorable apprentice.”

That was when Glenn noticed Lime behind Cthulhy. She laughed and flashed a peace sign. He hadn’t even seen her leave.

“Now then, Draconia. I hear you’re experiencing some back pain,” Cthulhy said. “I’ll fix you right up.”

“N-no! I do not want any of your medical tricks! I’ll take care of it with sorcery.”

“I have to imagine you’ve tried that already, with no success. C’mon, I’ll do it right now.”

“Argyaaa!”

Cthulhy easily swept Draconia up in her tentacles. The childlike sobek didn’t stand a chance against Cthulhy’s size and strength.

“Even your own apprentices are worried about you,” Cthulhy said. “Come now, girl. I’ll fix you up in a jiffy.”

“You pervert!” Draconia cried. “I wish you’d get caught in a scandal and fired! And I’m not a girl!”

Cthulhy chuckled. “You’re not even a hundred years old! You’re a child to me.”

Glenn was flabbergasted. It was unheard of for his mentor to insert herself into their affairs like this.

Sapphee was clearly surprised, too. “I didn’t realize you and Dr. Draconia were so close, Dr. Cthulhy.”

Glenn had assumed they didn't get along because of their opposing methodologies. Their principles probably *were* incompatible, but apparently, Cthulhy didn't dislike Draconia as a person.

"Looks like you're doing well with the lab, Glenn," Cthulhy said.

"Y-yes," Glenn replied, straightening up.

As his advisor, Cthulhy would evaluate Glenn's progress and determine if he met the graduation requirements. Having her here made him nervous.

"If you need anything, let me know. You aren't doctors yet, so be sure to consult a faculty member if you run into something you can't handle, yes?"

"Y-yes," he answered.

"Sapphee, Lime, he's your junior. Keep an eye on him. Now, let's go, Draconia," Cthulhy said, dragging Draconia down the hall.

"Leeet meee gooo!" the sobek screamed.

Cthulhy, of course, did nothing of the sort.

"No one can beat Dr. Cthulhy..."

Glenn exhaled. Whatever was going on between the two of them, it was probably best if he didn't interfere. Still, he felt a new respect for Lime, who'd had the foresight to get Cthulhy in the first place.

He looked around, eager to return to his own work, and realized Bellmer was still standing there.

"Thank you for today, Mr. Glenn," she said. "Not only did you determine where my pain is coming from, but also, Master will be treated by Dr. Cthulhy! I'm so glad I came to see the genius student of the medical department. You provided wonderful treatment!"

Bellmer started down the hall, clearly having no intention of letting him walk her back to the sorcery building. Glenn had heard that it was located underground, but the entrance was kept a secret from the other departments.

“Hey, Miss Bellmer?” he called.

She cocked her head to the side, looking cute. “Yes, what is it?”

Glenn searched for the right words. “Did you not notice that your strings were too taut?”

She didn’t answer right away. It *was* strange that she hadn’t noticed the source of her pain. Stranger still was that she hadn’t noticed the ceramic dust accumulating at her joints.

“Is it possible that your joint pain didn’t occur naturally?”

“What are you saying?” she asked.

“Is it possible that you...adjusted your strings in order to cause yourself pain?”

“What a strange thing to suggest, Mr. Glenn. Why would I cause myself pain?”

Glenn couldn’t read Bellmer’s expressionless face. “Perhaps you did it to draw Dr. Draconia out of her isolation?”

“Hmmm, and why would I want to do that?”

“That was what I couldn’t figure out...until today. You came to us multiple times. Draconia was bound to find out eventually. But it was only because she came to the lab that we discovered her lower back pain.” Glenn took a breath. “Was this all just a ploy to get treatment for her?”

Bellmer was silent, but she didn’t deny it.

Glenn pressed on. "Umm, I don't intend to push the issue much further, but—"

"Oh? Then why bring it up?"

"Well..."

The city of Nemea was located in a colder region of the continent, and it was almost evening. It was starting to get cool. The wind that blew as the sun set chilled Glenn's skin.

"No matter how much you want to help your master, hurting yourself isn't the answer. I hope you won't do something like this again."

What authority did this fourteen-year-old child have to tell Bellmer how she should act? He wasn't even a doctor yet.

"Hee hee..." she laughed.

"Huh?"

Bellmer tilted her head back and bellowed, as if she could no longer hold it in.

"Hee hee! Ha ha! Ahh, sorry, tee hee...!" Her mirth was so natural that she almost looked human. She even wiped her eyes as the laughter subsided. "Hee hee... oh, I'm very sorry. Mr. Glenn, you're overthinking things. I *do* care about my master, but I haven't harmed myself on purpose."

"Then...why you didn't notice the cause of your joint pain?"

"Shh..." Bellmer put her index finger to Glenn's lips. "A girl needs to have some secrets." She winked at him, and followed it up with a smirk. "I'm going now. But if you ever need anything from the sorcery department, ask for me. I owe you a debt."

Then, as if nothing had happened, Bellmer's face returned to its normal blank expression, and she was gone.

The whole thing was rather strange.

Glenn wondered if she actually had a much greater range of facial expression than she'd first let on. If so, why keep up the doll-like pretense? Maybe she didn't *want* to be mistaken for a human?

There was so much he didn't know about her, but that smile had melted his heart. Glenn would have to make sure that no one ever found out.

"I hope Glenn sorted everything out," Sapphee said, cleaning up the lab.

"I'm sure he'll be fine, yeah," said Lime, drinking a lemon tea. "He's just walking Bellmer to the Sorcery building. You're quite the worrywart, aren't you?"

She wasn't really helping, but she was slowly stroking the top of the table with one hand, digesting the dust.

"Glenn has grown up a lot," Sapphee said.

"Yeah. He really is a genius. He's already way surpassed me."

"That's not what I meant." Sapphee smiled. "I think he cares about monsters more than anyone else in the world."

"Oh! You're so sneaky, Sapphee! You like being around to guide him, don't you? Well, I want to guide him too, yeah! What's that face for?!"

Sapphee looked proud, both of herself and of her underclassman. Glenn was a young man full of promise, but promise meant nothing if you didn't put in the hard work. The fact that he was progressing so quickly meant that being here in Sapphee's lab was good for him.

"We need to keep helping him gain experience," Sapphee said. "Without working him too hard."

"When did you become so focused on Glenn? What about you? Don't you want to be a doctor?"

"I want to be a pharmacist, and work alongside a doctor."

"Ohh, I see."

Sapphee had no intention of neglecting her own studies—she just felt it important to help Glenn develop his natural talents. Supporting his future career would benefit her too but, more importantly, it could have a profound impact on the future of monster medicine all across the world.

"What about you, Lime?"

"Huh? What about me?"

"Do you plan on remaining Cthulhy's apprentice?"

Lime laughed. "Well, I haven't given much thought to becoming independent, yeah."

Sapphee found it strange. Lime didn't seem very passionate about medicine, as evidenced by her grades, yet Cthulhy trusted her. *Maybe it's her personality?* Everyone loved Lime. Cthulhy might simply be captivated by her charm, and there was nothing wrong with that. There might even come a day when Lime's charms saved the day.

"Folks say that Glenn is really going places," Lime added, always the first to hear such things.

"A rumor?"

"Sapphee, you need to be firm, yeah? Make it clear that Glenn belongs to *our* lab. Or others might try to recruit him."

"I can't force him... agh!"

Out of nowhere, Sapphee's body began to tremble. She scrunched up her face at the chill.

"Sapphee?"

Sapphee put her hands on the table, waiting for it to pass. "Oh, oh, it's n-nothing. Nothing at all. I have a bad feeling about this," she muttered, a sour look on her face.

It wasn't until much later that she realized she'd just felt the first pangs of a woman in love.

"Hee hee... there you are."

A figure lurked in the doorway of a dorm room, the curtains drawn in the room behind them to block out the light, reducing the figure to little more than a shadow. A shadow that was watching Glenn say goodbye to Bellmer, and had been watching him for far longer than that.

"Hee hee! A human...a human man..."

A woman's laugh echoed in the dark room.

Study 03: The Stationary Silkworm God

“Welcome, welcome! Thanks for coming! I’m glad. I’m really glad! Help yourself to snacks and tea! Here. Do you want anything else? Make sure you tell me if you need something, got it?”

Glenn wondered how he’d gotten here. He racked his brain, but remained at a loss. The upperclassman in front of him was a student from the accessory division of the domestic science department.

“Anything you need!” she said. “We’re going to be living together, after all. From now on, we’ll always be together, got it?”

The feelers on her head waved in a friendly way, but her smile didn’t reach her eyes. She was staring at Glenn with a kind of wild devotion, undisguised and unconditional.

“Oh, right, I never introduced myself! I’m Fu Sang. I guess you’d pronounce it ‘Fuso’ in the common tongue. That’s what my

friends at the Academy call me. I don’t have that many friends. But I’m not lonely, because I have you, got it?”

Was this affection? Or something else? She had large white wings, two pairs of arms, and feelers sprouting from her head.

She’s an insect species...a butterfly? No...maybe a silk moth.

But...Glenn didn’t know her. He’d never even seen her before.

“I like you. I’m sure I do. I think I can like you, got it?” Fuso carried on merrily.

The way she talked gave Glenn goosebumps. She’d thanked him for coming, but that wasn’t what had happened. Glenn was walking around campus, minding his own business, when she’d bound him and brought him to her room.

“Let’s start right away,” Fuso said brightly. “You were just taking care of me, Mr. Human. Mr. Glenn. Got it?”

Glenn had no idea what she was talking about.

The room was decorated in the eastern style. There were shoji doors, tatami mats, and bright colors. Everything reminded Glenn of his family home. It was also the first time he’d seen such things at the Nemea Academy.

The girl wore an eastern-style kimono, tied with an obi. At first glance, he thought her fluffy white hair was cut in a bob, but when he looked closer, he realized it spread outward like moth wings. But then, many insect monsters had wing-like appendages growing out of their heads.

“Am I rare?” Fuso said, as if reading his mind. “No, not really. But I’m sure you know all about our species, got it?”

Glenn was still tied up. Fuso batted her eyes. She seemed to have completely forgotten that she’d snatched him off the street.

“Know?” he said. “No, I don’t know any insect monsters...”

“Oh, is that so? That makes me so sad. But don’t you know us? We are silkworm gods. We’re the monsters who lived in the human realm, got it?”

“Silkworm gods...”

There were legends about those in Glenn’s hometown. The tales differed from region to region: in some places, the

beings were silkworm gods, and in others, minor gods of agriculture. There were even areas where local residents dressed mulberry trees in kimono as a form of worship.

“You mean...they’re not gods, but a species of monster?” he asked.

“Yeah, that’s right. We diverged from the butterfly monsters, and have always lived with humans. Hey, are you surprised? Did I surprise you? Hee hee! I’m glad. I’m glad you know about us.”

“In the human realm?”

Glenn was sure Sapphee and Lime would be worried when he didn’t show up to the lab. He needed to get out of here. But...a monster that lived in the human realm? He’d never heard of such a thing. His curiosity outweighed his fear.

“We were livestock.” Fuso grinned. Her smile could have charmed any man. “We were domesticated, in the same way that wolves became dogs, or boars became pigs. One particular species of butterfly monster has lived with humans for so long that their origins have been lost to history. That’s why...we became the silkworm gods.”

“Er...”

“When we are young, silkworm gods expel raw thread that can be made into the most exquisite silk. I made a lot, too. But as we mature, we lose that ability. The humans made us that way.”

“You mean they domesticated you for their own benefit...creating a subspecies of monster?”

Domestication wasn’t evil, in and of itself. Animals adapted to their environment, sometimes helped along by humans—pigs, dogs, and cats had all evolved from their wild

forefathers. It wasn't impossible for a butterfly monster to adapt to coexist with humans.

"You didn't know? During the war, our entire species was driven out of the human realm, even though we'd always lived with humans. Even though our bodies had *evolved* to live with humans. That's what I heard, anyway. The parting must have been so cruel..."

Glenn felt a little guilty. "You say you heard...so you weren't there yourself?"

"No. It was right before the war broke out, about a hundred years ago. But my grandma told me all about the time she spent with humans. She said they were kind... when we were young, they took our silk. When we were adults, they took care of us. Grandma said they did everything for us."

Glenn bit his lip. Now, he understood where the tales of silkworm gods came from...and why traces of that devotion remained in the culture of his homeland. Raw silk was the foundation of many people's livelihood, and harvesting thread from these monsters was more efficient than raising actual silkworms. Given their size, they must have been able to produce a considerable amount.

"When I heard the stories, I longed for that kind of relationship," Fuso said. She laid a trembling hand on her cheek. "Grandma said humans were so kind. That's why I've wanted to meet one for so long. But I've had no way to reunite with them...until now!"

"Umm...what is it you want from me?" Glenn asked, although he wasn't sure that he wanted to hear the answer.

Fuso cocked her head. "You're a human. I'm a silkworm god. Got it?"

"Oh, yeah."

“There’s only one thing you can do. I just told you, right? I said it many times. You’ll take care of me. That’s the bond between our two species.”

“Care for you... what do you mean?”

“My legs are weak,” Fuso said, stretching one out from under the hem of her kimono and rubbing it.

She was wearing black knee socks. Glenn looked at her plump calf. It seemed fine.

“It’s hard for me to stand and walk. Even when I asked you to join me, just now—”

“You took me.”

“No, I mean, when I tied you up and you came here of your own free will... that was really hard. That’s why I never leave my room. I *can’t* leave my room. I need care. I need someone to do everything. Make tea, feed snacks, brush my hair, got it?”

Glenn was dumbstruck. This woman wanted him to become her servant? And she was acting like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“No, um, I...I’m sorry, but I have to work in the lab.”

“You’re going?” Fuso sounded like she was crying, but there were no tears in her bright, captivating eyes. “You’re leaving me? But...my body is weak. I get sick easily. The humans bred us that way. They only cared that we had enough strength to produce silk. Once I’m an adult...why, I’ll really be completely useless.”

Glenn felt dizzy. “Er...”

What she was describing wasn’t so different from regular, domesticated silkworms. As larva, their legs were so weak they couldn’t even hold onto trees. It must have taken thousands of years to breed wild insects to produce silk in such a way, and the silkworm gods were probably the same.

The original species must have been closely tied to humans who, in turn, spent every waking hour with them. And all of it just to make thread. The more he thought about it, the more his head hurt.

“As long as I have a human, I’ll be all right. I can live as a silkworm god. Unless you abandon me. But you’re not going to do that, right?”

Glenn said nothing. Fuso was right about that much: he was too kind to refuse her point-blank, and he certainly couldn’t bring himself to abandon her. She seemed to trust him.

I can just give her a little attention.

That would probably be enough to satisfy her, right? Surely, wouldn’t rely on him for *everything*.

“Umm...I understand what you’re saying, but I can’t do it.”

“Why? Why? Why?”

He was hopelessly overpowered. “You need to untie me...”

“Oh, right. Sorry about that. I was just so happy to finally meet a human. Please forgive me, got it?”

Fuso released Glenn from his bindings. She’d said her legs were weak, but she didn’t seem to have any problem using her four arms. She was a student of the accessories department, so maybe she was exceptionally skilled with her hands.

Fuso smiled and tilted her head. “I look forward to living with you, Glenn, got it?”

“Yes...”

Glenn hadn’t yet realized, but he’d completely underestimated her.

Sapphee was pacing.

"Sapphee...you're scaring me, yeah?"

"I am not!"

Sapphee was supposed to be writing a report on herbal medicine and she never neglected her own research. Not until today.

"You haven't even written one line yet, yeah?"

"I'll write it now." Sapphee's pen hovered above the parchment, but didn't move. "Uhh."

"I mean, I know how you feel...now that Glenn isn't coming to the lab anymore..."

"Don't say it." Sapphee put the pen back and covered her face. "Why? Why doesn't he come? He used to come every day..."

Lime's pigtails were limp with distress. "Every time class ends, he's rushing off somewhere. I tried to catch him today, but he just disappeared, yeah..."

"Ahh...I can't take it."

They'd temporarily stopped doing consultations. Sapphee could have seen some patients alone, but Glenn's medical skills already surpassed hers. After all, she was a pharmacist, not a doctor.

"Lime do you know anything about why Glenn stopped coming?"

Lime tried, unsuccessfully, to whistle. "Ahh... whoo."

"Hey! Lime!"

"N-no, I don't know anything!"

“You’re a terrible liar. What do you know?!”

Sapphee tried to catch the slime with her tail, but Lime slipped out of her grasp.

“Sapphee...don’t get mad, yeah?”

“When you say it like that, I *know* it’s something that’ll make me mad.”

“I can take your anger, Sapphee! I know you love Glenn so much. So the rumor...ahhh.”

“Huh?” Sapphee turned away, her face beet-red, and crossed her arms. She’d thought she’d hidden her feelings from everyone. “I-I don’t think of Glenn like—I mean he is a cute underclassman, but...”

“C’mon Sapphee. You’re not fooling me, yeah. You like him, don’t you?”

Sapphee thumped her tail on the ground. “Sh-shut up! It’s not like that!”

Lime stared at the floor, trying to find the right words. “Okay...don’t get mad, yeah?”

“I won’t. We’re just classmates.”

“Actually...well. I heard from a number of witnesses... that after class, Glenn was heading to another student’s room...a female student.”

“What are you saying?!”

Thump thump thump. Sapphee’s tail pounded against the floor.

“Agggghhh! See, you are mad, yeah!”

“I’m! Not! Mad!”

Lime turned herself into a ball and bounced into a corner. “You can admit it!”

“A female student?! What does that mean?!”

“It might just be a rumor! I didn’t see it for myself, yeah!”

Sapphee stopped thumping her tail and took a deep, calming breath. Getting angry with Lime wouldn’t help anything. “Tell me more.”

“I don’t know any more! I heard something about him being friendly with an insect monster, yeah? I mean...no, I didn’t! I have no idea if they were being friendly or not!”

“It’s fine. It’s none of my business if Glenn is going somewhere else.”

Lime slowly returned to her human form. “Yeah.”

“Any lab would benefit from his presence. I expected other students to approach him.”

“All I know is that he was seen with a female student, yeah,” Lime said. “I don’t even know what faculty.”

“Is he making a house call?!”

“Ahh, that would make sense. Maybe there’s a student who can’t come to the lab. When Bellmer came by, she wanted to do it secretly, so that the department heads wouldn’t know she was there, yeah?”

In reality, Bellmer *had* wanted her department head to know she was being examined, but Lime didn’t know that.

“That must be it, yeah! He must be on a house call!”

“Yes,” Sapphee agreed. “That’s the only thing that makes sense.”

“Well, at least we got that figured out, yeah!”

Lime and Sapphee giggled together.

“Now then, if that’s all for today...”

Lime turned to the door, but Sapphee closed it with her long tail. At some point, she’d picked up a jar of desiccant.

“Wait right there.”

“Aggggh! Desiccants are poison to slimes!”

“I know that. I’m not going to get any on you...if you research something for me. Will you?”

Lime’s entire body quivered with fear. “Eeek! Yes! I will, just put that away!”

It was an empty threat, of course, but Lime didn’t know that. Sapphee returned the jar to the shelf.

“I trust Glenn. I don’t think he would get this close to a strange girl. But...”

“Why do you feel so strongly about this when you two aren’t even together, yeah?”

“Forget about that! Just find out everything you can about the insect monster student!”

“U-understood, yeah!” Lime saluted.

Sapphee felt better already. Lime knew so many people, she’d find something. And of course, Sapphee would conduct her own research.

“Anyway,” she said. “It’s for the lab. I’m worried about Glenn, but feelings have nothing to do with it. Got it, Lime?”

“Yes, yes. Sure, sure, let’s go with that story.”

“Hey!”

“I have rumors to collect. Bye!”

And with that, Lime was gone—slipping through the gap under the door before Sapphee could threaten her with anything else.

“Unbelievable...” Sapphee said playing with her hair. “It’s really *not* about me liking Glenn...”

Saphentite Neikes was seventeen. She was still too young to admit she was in love, especially with her

childhood friend.

Meanwhile, Glenn was busy caring for Fuso, day in and day out. And as it turned out, it was impossible to know whether Fuso was incapable of doing anything, because she didn't even *try*.

She didn't cook, or clean, or do laundry. When she told him to take care of her, he thought he'd just be helping out a bit, but apparently, she meant for him to wait on her hand and foot.

"Ahh..."

Fuso let out a contented sigh and sipped the tea Glenn had made.

Her room was a cluttered mess. There was laundry piled in the corner, and her undergarments were strewn about. Stacks of dust-covered textbooks were everywhere, along with silk clothing, which Fuso had probably made. Evidently, she'd decided she didn't need to study anymore.

"Er..."

Fuso didn't seem the least bit fazed when Glenn picked up the underwear that she'd just removed. She'd simply said: "You'll wash them for me, right?"

It was all too much stimulation for the young medical student.

She's supposed to be studying domestic science, right?

The domestic science department was established to train aspiring maids and butlers to wait on their future employers, particularly aristocrats. Student who did well could graduate with good references to help them find work.

Of course, they could also use the skills they learned to start their own businesses—in the fashion industry for instance, like a certain new company named Loose Silk Sewing.

“Glenn, this tea is too strong. I don’t like it.”

“Er...ah, I-I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. Be more careful next time, got it?”

No matter how you looked at it, Fuso was the master, and Glenn was serving her.

What can I do...?

He’d thought that if he did some of the things Fuso asked, she’d be satisfied, and let him go. He couldn’t have been more wrong.

“Tee hee!” Fuso giggled as she watched him. As it turned out, the truth was more that she believed that humans should serve her unconditionally. It was really quite terrifying.

“Umm...Fuso?”

“What is it, Mr. Glenn?”

At least she showed him respect in how she addressed him.

“I’m sorry, but I think there’s too much work for me to do...”

“Oh, really? You should be happy, Mr. Glenn. I prepared all of this work just for you. I made sure not to clean any part of the room. Aren’t you glad you have so much to do? You’re glad, right? I mean, it’s the supreme joy of humans to care for the silkworm gods. Therefore, it’s *your* joy to care for *me*, got it?”

Glenn couldn’t think of anything to say, so he didn’t. Fuso didn’t have any firsthand experience of living with humans, or what life was like when silkworm gods lived in

the human realm. She was just going off of her grandmother's stories. That must be why she had such a strange take on this whole situation. She thought humans were there for her convenience, and that making them serve her was the ideal relationship for both sides.

He was at his wit's end. He had no idea of what to do with her. He'd never really spoken to other students besides Sapphee and Lime, except those who came to the lab for consultations.

"Mr. Glenn, I'm so glad you're taking such good care of me every day, got it?"

"Oh, uh..."

Glenn couldn't say that he was only coming because he feared what she would do to him if he didn't. The truth was that he'd never done any household chores before. At his family home, he'd spent all his time studying. Now that he was living in the dormitory, he had to do some of that work himself, though he wasn't particularly good at it.

As a domestic science student, Fuso had a lot to say about the quality of his work. Every day, she told him what he was lacking, but she also still summoned him back the next day. He was even starting to slip behind in his own work. Ever since he'd started going to Fuso's room, he hadn't made it to the lab even once.

"Umm, Fuso?"

"What is it, Mr. Glenn? Why aren't you working?"

"I'm sorry, but this is the last day I'll be able to take care of you."

"Hunh..." Fuso's expression turned to something between shock and pain. "Why? Why would you say something like that?"

"I mean, I have my own life. I want to become a doctor, and I came to school to achieve that dream."

"Is that so? I thought you came to this school to take care of me."

Glenn wondered how she could think that about someone she'd only just met.

"I need to study," he said. "I have to work in the lab. I can't stay here all the time taking care of you."

"Th-that won't do! You need to be by my side always, Mr. Glenn! Humans take care of silkworm gods who are no longer able to produce thread. That's how we live."

Fuso dragged herself over to Glenn and latched on to him, holding him close.

"Ugh!"

She pulled Glenn down, looking as if she was about to cry.

Now that he'd had some time to observe her, he knew she wasn't lying about having weak legs. But how had she managed before they met?

"Right," she said. "You still have work to do. Important work. Yes. Let's do that. Mr. Glenn, you will be pleased. You won't want to leave ever again, got it?"

"Work...?"

"Making babies," Fuso said with a carefree smile. "We need to make babies."

"What?"

"Children are important. Only silkworm god larvae can produce thread. Generally, silkworm gods make children together, but humans can do it as well. Did you know that? That's why, when there isn't a suitable silkworm suitor, we marry humans. My grandma's grandma did that, got it?"

It was common folklore, the story of a farmer's daughter coupling with a silkworm. It was one of the reasons the silkworm was also the god of married couples.

"Got it?" Fuso said again loosening her kimono.

Her chest was well developed. The pubescent Glenn had trouble keeping his eyes off her pale, attractive body. He knew it was wrong, but he couldn't help it.

"Tee hee." He felt her hot breath on his neck. Apparently, Fuso was already aroused. "Now then, let's make babies, Mr. Glenn. Got it?"

Glenn shuddered. It was clear she believed this was a good idea, but she'd also said that humans kept silkworm gods as livestock. Such a coupling, even back when the two species cohabitated, was frowned upon. The farmer's daughter from the stories probably could have found another human to mate with. Same for the silkworm god. He wondered why they hadn't done that? Maybe there weren't enough suitors to choose from. Or the farmer wanted grandchildren who could produce thread, and had forced them to marry.

Or maybe they truly were in love.

I need to stop this.

If he thought about this too hard, Glenn was going to start hating himself. He needed to work out what to do with Fuso.

"I'm not going to make babies," he said.

"What? Why?"

"That's something you do with someone you truly love."

"I love you, Mr. Glenn. I love you a lot. I hate all other people, but I would have as many of your babies as you wanted. There aren't many silkworm gods left. Just those of

us who are living in secret. So let's do it. Let's repopulate the species, got it?"

Fuso lifted the hem of her kimono.



Despite himself, Glenn stared at her milk-white thighs. Her stout, powerful body awakened something within him. But still...

"That's... you only want to make babies because I'm a human, right?" he asked.

"Of course."

Glenn felt like she'd poured a bucket of cold water over his heart. In the end, Fuso only wanted him because of his species. No matter how attractive she was, he no longer felt any desire for her.

"Like I said, my dream is to become a doctor. That's why I need to study hard. I need Dr. Cthulhy to certify my graduation. I can't live with you."

Fuso started sobbing. "I can't believe it. I can't believe *you*. Traitor!"

She covered her face, tears streaming down through her fingers, but she wasn't the best actress. She kept peering at him through her hands. The average guy might have told her to knock it off. After all, *she* was the one who'd kidnapped *him*. But Glenn was softhearted. Even if he *was* disgusted with her actions, he couldn't just abandon her.

"I have a proposal," he said.

"What? What is it?"

"I'm not a doctor yet, but I'm learning. So, even though I can't keep coming to take care of you, I can at least take a look at your legs. Maybe I can help you that way."

"Impossible."

The wings on Fuso's head began to flap. They were like a mirror for her emotions, but Glenn wasn't sure what they were expressing. Was she angry? Sad? Something else entirely?

“Impossible,” she repeated. “Even a doctor couldn’t help me. I was born with weak legs. It’s not an illness or an injury. And you’re still just a student, right, Mr. Glenn?”

“I won’t know unless I examine them.”

“Fine.” Fuso stuck one leg out at him. “Like I said, it’s a congenital condition. I highly doubt you’ll be able to do anything. But if you wish, Mr. Glenn, I will entrust my legs to you. My legs, my body, my heart...”

Glenn stiffened.

“But...Mr. Glenn? What will you do once you realize you can’t treat me? Will you agree to stay with me forever?”

“Well...” There were some ailments that couldn’t be treated. Medicine had its limits, and so did life. He wasn’t about to agree to any conditions. “I’ll do everything I can.”

“Please do. I trust you, Mr. Glenn. I trust you with my life. But, but...” Fuso hid her mouth under the fur at her collar. “Once you see that no treatment will work...you will fulfill your duties as a human, got it?”

“I will not give up on my dream.”

“Of course. You don’t have to give up on your dream! That’s right! You can care for me as a doctor. Forever. And ever and ever, right?”

Glenn could see the thousands—maybe even tens of thousands—of years of emotion in Fuso’s eyes. It was the legacy of silkworm gods whom humans had treated like livestock. It wasn’t good or evil. It wasn’t sorrow or hate. It was just the grim acceptance of reality. Fuso could never live as anything but a silkworm god, and that was the cruelest fact of all.

“I’ll do everything I can.” Glenn repeated.

Fuso smiled, her leg still extended. “Please do, got it?”

Glenn knelt to examine her. "Excuse me."

Fuso was sitting on her mattress. She was wearing a red, skirt-like garment under her kimono. He started by touching her calf, trying hard not to look at her thighs.

Fuso sighed softly. "Hmm..."

Her legs were weak, just as she'd said. That was Glenn's first impression. However, the issue wasn't a lack of muscle. She had good amounts of both muscle and fat. Her legs simply weren't strong enough to support her properly. But why?

"Mmm, woo, mm-ahh."

Her body is designed to accumulate nutrients so she can excrete thread. Silkworm gods had probably evolved to accumulate fat easier than muscle. In cases like Fuso's, if muscle mass didn't develop proportionately, they could no longer stand on their own.

Glenn poked and prodded, checking the shape of her muscles, the distribution of her fat, and the strength of her bones.

"Ahh...mmaahh, agh," Fuso cried.

She was overreacting. Maybe she was still hoping to make babies with him. The way she twisted her body looked flirtatious, but Glenn continued to examine her leg as professionally as he could manage.

I wonder if physical training would help.

He wanted to believe it. As he examined Fuso, he soon realized that she wasn't getting enough exercise. Still, even if she could build up some muscle, he didn't know how much it would help. Her body just wasn't built for it.

"I'm sorry, I need to press a little harder."

Fuso looked at Glenn with red, moist eyes. "Ahh, ahh, that's fine... ahhhn."

She was almost looking hopeful now. Glenn concentrated on the exam.

"I'm sorry, I need to touch your thighs, too."

"Yes, of course. Of course, got it?"

Glenn moved his hand up Fuso's thighs. Like the rest of her, they were soft and plump.

"Mmm, ahhh... ahh...!"

"I'm sorry. I need to press a little harder."

"Ahh, ahh, it's fine...ahhh."

Fuso's whole body was twitching. "Mmm...ahh... aghhh!"

"Oh, sorry. Does that tickle?"

"It's fine, it's fine...ahh, ahhhmmm."

Fuso's kimono was still open, but she didn't seem concerned with fixing it. Glenn thought back over her voice, attitude, and appearance. Everything she did was sensual. Even the mood right now was one that felt like it might still lead to making babies. He cleared his throat, but her reactions only intensified.

"Mm, ahh... mm, ahhh!"

He couldn't ignore the sounds she was making...nor the heat of her breath.

"Fuso, can you try to keep it down a little?"

"Y-yes. I understand. I'll try to hold it in. Ahh, heee, mmm."

She bit the hem of her kimono to keep quiet, but that only emphasized how sensitive she was.

"Mmm, mmm, mmm...!"

He touched her soft thighs and felt the strength of the bone beneath them. Next, he touched her groin.

“Mmm, grrr, ahh, ohh, ahhh... argh, no!”

That was clearly her trigger point.

“Mmm, mmm, mm-ahhh!”

The hem of the kimono between her teeth was soaked with her saliva.

“Uh, umm, Fuso...are you all right?”

Her eyes had started to cloud over. “Mmm, ahh... I-I’m fine, got it...?”

After the examination, she adjusted her kimono, wiped the hem, and sat up straight.

Glenn groaned inwardly. There was nothing he could do to treat her. Her genetics were what they were. It wasn’t as if she couldn’t walk at all, and she might even be able to increase her muscle mass and improve her condition. But...

I don’t think Fuso has any intention of doing that.

Her body wasn’t a solid mass of muscle like Cerve’s. Fuso was plump, but she wasn’t exactly unhealthy. Her body was simply the result of years of domestication. Any excess nutrients would probably go to her thighs or chest.

“Do you need to touch me here, too?”

Fuso smiled, indicating her chest. She’d fixed her kimono, but Glenn could still make out the shape of her breasts.

“Er. N-no, I’m fine.”

“Really? Tell me if you want to. You’re welcome to anytime, got it?”

She really never stopped, did she?

Being attractive was important to silkworm gods. If they weren't attractive, humans wouldn't care for them. That was why Glenn couldn't look away, even though he knew it was wrong.

"Mr. Glenn? What was the result of the exam?"

"Right... well. I think it would be difficult to stand on your legs as they are. It would take a long course of rehabilitation. Even so, I think some kind of mobility aid, like a crutch or a cane, might help you." Glenn looked down. "I'm so sorry. Beyond that, I can't help you."

"It's fine. It's really fine. I don't care about that. I know that if my legs remain weak, you'll take care of me. Isn't that right, Mr. Glenn? Got it?"

Glenn groaned. "Er..."

The focus of Fuso's entire existence was to be waited on by humans. Glenn couldn't tell if she'd made herself weak on purpose so someone would take care of her, or if she needed care because she was weak. He only knew one thing.

That's not it.

Fuso was a beautiful woman. He wanted to protect her. He wanted to help her. There was a certain innocence about her.

That's not it...

Glenn remembered something Cthulhy had said: *What would the doctor you want to be do?*

"I told you," Glenn said. "I can't stay here."

"Why not?"

"Fuso, you have no desire to be healed. I know not all illnesses can be cured. Genetic issues, like yours, can only be managed. But so what?" Glenn wanted to look away, but

he made a point of looking Fuso directly in the eyes. "The role of a doctor is to help those who are sick or injured. But if you don't *want* to be helped, then there's nothing I can do."

Fuso's eyes were filled with despair. "But..."

How would he deal with a patient who was simply afraid, or didn't like their treatment? In those cases, Glenn could either to convince them or think of another way. Regardless, there was still work he could do. But in Fuso's case, it was different.

It wasn't as if she didn't like the treatment. She didn't think she *needed* treatment. That was the same as saying she didn't need a doctor.

"If you don't need a doctor, then I need to be doing other work. I'm very sorry, Fuso, but I quit."

"That's harsh."

Fuso closed in on him, using her arms to crawl and dragging her legs behind her. Despite her weakness, there was a certain strength in her eyes. A strength that came from hatred, sadness and the torrent of other emotions Glenn couldn't identify.

"You're a terrible human, Mr. Glenn. The reason I'm like this is *because* of humans. We were bred to produce thread. That's why my body is weak. And for that, you'll abandon me? You'll betray me? Really?"

"Er..."

She wasn't violent, but Glenn felt her words like a punch to the gut all the same. His ancestors had harmed hers. She was right to hold him responsible, but...

"Fuso, it's true that I'm human, but I wasn't alive when silkworm gods were living with humans."

"Er...!"

Glenn knew he'd said the wrong thing. Fuso's eyes glistened. Glenn tried not to hate himself for the fact that his ancestors had subjugated her species, but it was useless.

"No," she said. "I won't have it. We'll be together forever. You'll take care of me. That's all I need. You don't need money. The silk I make sells at high prices. We'll have more money than we know what to do with. And when I can't make it anymore, our children will produce thread for us."

"Fuso."

"It's fine. Just abandon me. I don't care. But then, what will happen to me? What happens to a species that can't live alone?"

Was she really suggesting she'd die if he didn't take care of her? Was that really the fate of her species?

Glenn bit his lip. Sweat was running down his neck. This wasn't his job but, as an aspiring doctor, could he truly abandon a patient to die? What could he do? There was no one to give him advice.

How lucky he was to have Sapphee and Lime. He would've felt a lot better if they were here with him. In the lab, he could always find the right answer, even when presented with seemingly unsolvable problems.

"Hey, human! What are you going to do, huh? Hey!"

Fuso was ruthless. She was doing everything except attacking him.

"Fuso, I..." What was he supposed to say? "I don't think you can keep living like this!"

Fuso's eyes flashed with rage. "Grr!"

He was strangely relieved. She looked up to humans the same way a pet might look up to their owner. But if she could get angry enough to rebel against him, then it meant

she had her own free will. She wasn't livestock. She could live an independent life.

"I won't forgive you! A human must be with me forever and ever and ever...!"

Or not.

Fuso dragged him to the floor and sobbed bitter angry tears. Glenn no longer pitied her, but what was happening to her was hardly her fault. He just needed to come up with a solution.

"Calm down, will you?!"

Glenn heard a voice he recognized, as light suddenly flooded the dark room. Fuso screeched.

"Glenn, are you all right? I was wondering why you'd stopped coming to the lab. I heard you might be here."

Fuso fled to the corner. She sure could move quickly for someone unable to use her legs.

"Are you Fuso?"

"You're terrible, awful! Coming into my room without permission!"

"This from someone who doesn't attend classes, shirks her work, and skips out on the entire academic experience? The domestic science department doesn't know what to do with you. Not to mention...you kidnapped my junior! Where do you get off calling *me* terrible?!"

The figure in the doorway resolved itself into Sapphee, and Fuso got a true glimpse of the wrath of a lamia.

It was enough to shut her up, at least for a moment. She glared at Sapphee in silence for a moment.

"Y-yeah!" she said at last. "I did capture Glenn! What's wrong with that? You think that's wrong?!"

"You're going to take the offensive *now*?"

“Y-yeah! I’m a silkworm god. I can’t live without a human! I need Mr. Glenn, got it? How can you say that’s wrong? Who could possibly blame me for that?”

“Unbelievable...” Sapphee looked to Glenn with a disgusted expression on her face, but she didn’t look like she was going to reprimand him. “No one said it was wrong. I’m sure you’re telling the truth.”

“So then—”

“But Glenn can’t take care of you alone. We’ll all help you.”

The shoji doors around the tiny tatami room opened, and a number of monsters walked in.

They were all female.

“Oh, um—”

“We finally found you, Miss Fuso!” said a scorpion monster. She was small and, judging by the way she spoke, probably a junior in the domestic science department. “Come now! You need to catch up on your work! I’ll help you!”

“N-nooo! I’m going to live here quietly and comfortably! Mr. Glenn, save me!”

“What are you talking about?” said the scorpion girl. “Students come here to study! As long as I’m around, I won’t let you live a degenerate life, Miss Fuso!”

The students loaded Fuso onto a board with four handles. It looked like one of the portable shrines from Glenn’s hometown. Fuso cried out pathetically from her new perch.

Glenn bowed to the scorpion girl. She seemed to be the one in charge.

"I'm sorry for causing you so much trouble," she told him. "Miss Fuso has excellent grades and makes excellent clothes, but...she just isn't motivated."

"Ahh."

She bowed in apology. "The entire department organized a club to take care of her, but she still acts selfishly. I'm sure she said a lot of...strange things to you."

"Oh, yeah..."

"She can do more than she lets on," she said. "She actually decorated this entire room."

"How did she do it?" Glenn asked.

"I guess she got students from other departments to help her. She has... I guess you would call them people skills? She's great at making others help her out."

Glenn was already acutely aware of that. It didn't surprise him to hear Fuso used the same tricks on other students, too.

"Thanks to Miss Lime," said the scorpion girl. "We finally discovered where Miss Fuso was hiding."

"It was nothing!" If she'd been capable of it, Lime probably would've blushed. "Glenn was kidnapped, so I had to do something, yeah!"

"Nnnooo! Mr. Glennnn!" Fuso called out after him.

The scorpion girl sighed. "We should go. Everyone together!"

Fuso squirmed ineffectively. "Ergh, you juniors...I'll never forgive you...!"

"You can hate on us later. Now, let's stop bothering the other departments."

And with that, Fuso's classmates carried her off. With her weak legs, she couldn't even jump off. It seemed

unlikely she'd be skipping her accessories classes again anytime soon, but she was undeterred.

"Mr. Glenn! I'll never give up! Someday we'll live together! Got it? Got ittt?!"

There was so much he still didn't understand about Fuso. She was even more inscrutable than Bellmer.

"What a disaster, Glenn," Sapphee sighed.

"Y-yeah..."

"Now then, we have a patient waiting. If you don't return to the lab, you won't earn your credits. And, since you came here voluntarily, I don't think you'll get any goodwill from Dr. Cthulhy."

Glenn nodded. "I know."

Cthulhy wasn't the type to give students a break simply because they got into trouble.

"Ugh! It was terrible, yeah!" Lime bounced, her pigtails squishing up and down as she fished for some praise. "I had to figure out who you were seeing was and where she was from. I had to talk to everyone in the Academy."

"Lime, thank you for all your work," Glenn said.

"The hardest part was that there were no clues. But we couldn't just burst in without any information. So I started talking to students from other departments. Fuso's fan club was searching for her too, so we joined forces!"

"I see..."

It had probably been Sapphee's idea to think before acting. She was surprisingly prudent in situations like that.

"Anyway, it's a lie that she can't live independently," said Sapphee. "The silkworm gods are an established species in the monster realm. She might have been born with an especially weak body, but she came all the way to

the Academy from her hometown. Even if she had help from others, she can certainly do a lot more than she admits.”

“Fuso is quite popular, yeah,” Lime agreed. “The accessories she makes are creative, and she has a lot of passionate fans, even in other departments. She’s strong. She doesn’t need to rely on you at all, Glenn.”

So he wasn’t mistaken when he’d judged that she would be all right by herself, after all. That was a relief. Her attachment to humans was troubling, but she should still be able to thrive.

“I’m sorry, Glenn,” Sapphee said. “I should have come sooner. I didn’t realize you were being used like that.”

“It’s fine. It was pretty unexpected, but I also learned a lot...”

“Glenn?”

He was wondering if there was anything he could do for Fuso. Even if he couldn’t take care of her daily needs, maybe he could do something about her legs.

“Glenn!”

“Huh?”

“You’re not trying to think of a way to treat Fuso, are you?”

He didn’t answer.

There was nothing a doctor could do for patients who didn’t want to be healed. But if Fuso changed her mind someday...Glenn was sure he could help her.

Sapphee puffed out her cheeks. “Unbelievable...”

Sapphee might seem cold and aloof, but when she was angry, she almost looked normal. Lime found it adorable. Even though students like Sapphee and Glenn seemed to receive special treatment from Cthulhy, Lime wasn’t jealous.

She thought it was wonderful that everyone was working hard to achieve their dreams. Besides, Lime had her own role, assigned by Cthulhy.

“Lime, what do you think about making a cane for Fuso?” Glenn asked.

“Why not? It sounds like something you would do, yeah.”

There were crutches in the corner of the lab that allowed a patient’s lower limbs to be supported using the arms and armpits, but they didn’t have a crosspiece. Glenn planned to make a prototype from Fuso’s measurements, then ask a craftsperson in town to fabricate them.

“It’ll be a waste if she doesn’t use them, though, yeah?” Lime said. “If Fuso doesn’t have the ambition to be independent...”

“That’s true...” Sapphee agreed. She wasn’t convinced, either.

In many ways, Glenn was still a child. But he was passionate about becoming a doctor. All the same, that wasn’t enough for Sapphee.

“You’re doing this for that silkworm moth girl?!” she said. “The one who kidnapped you?! And used you?! And tried to make babies with you?! For her?!”

“Ahh ha ha!” Lime laughed. “You’re just angry because you think someone’s going to take your precious Glenn from you. You can’t believe he would treat her.”

“Uh, ah! N-No, that’s not why!”

“You don’t need to hide it! Honestly, I don’t think much of Fuso either, yeah. I mean, using her ancestry to make Glenn her servant?”

“I don’t think Fuso feels any guilt about it, but if what Glenn told us is true...”

There was no way Sapphee could forgive what Fuso had put him through.

“Why is Glenn so intent on treating her?” Lime asked.

“I wonder... he was much more distant with Cerve.”

“Hee hee hee! Perhaps this is a sign of his growth? I guess that’s how a natural-born medical genius thinks, yeah?”

Sapphee’s face was stern. “It’s worrisome.”

Lime understood how she felt. Glenn was trying to take care of someone who’d caused him harm. He wanted to save everyone, as though it was an act of sacrifice.

“That’s why we need to be protecting him, yeah?” said Lime.

“Yes...”

“Let’s make sure no one else snatches him up so you don’t have to be jealous, yeah.”

“I’m not jealous!”

Lime laughed at how weak that lie was. Sapphee glared at her. As far as her heart was concerned, Fuso was probably her biggest rival.

“What about you, Lime?”

“Huh?”

“Are you okay with Glenn being taken away from you?”

Lime fell silent. She had a lot of connections. She was naturally considerate and could make friends with anyone. No matter what other people thought, Lime was able to get along with them. Perhaps that lack of pettiness was why everyone else looked so childish from Lime’s perspective.

She was so used to mimicking non-slime emotions that they were child’s play to her. Sapphee was especially easy to

read. For example, right now she was sizing Lime up, trying to figure out if she was a rival or not.

Lime put on the most appropriate face for the situation. "Of course, I was a little jealous, yeah! I don't want anyone to take my favorite underclassman! So as soon as I knew the facts, I called up the club girls and went to get Glenn back, yeah!"

"Y-yes you did..."

"But, well..." Lime snickered again. "But I wasn't as jealous as you, yeah."

"I told you, Lime! It's not like that!"

"Oh, no, you're so scary!" Lime said, trying to flee.

But her words had done the trick. They had convinced Sapphee that Lime valued Glenn as an classmate, but that she didn't have any romantic feelings for him.

No one would benefit if I said that I liked Glenn, too, Lime thought.

She *did* feel affection for him. Glenn was sweeter and more passionate than anyone she knew. And the smile he sometimes flashed made her melt. Often literally. But she was better off not saying that. If she admitted to it, she'd lose her friendship with Sapphee, and it would be difficult to continue to work in the lab together. No, it was best to shut away those feelings, before they grew out of control.

It would be the only decision that Lime would ever regret. And the one thing she'd never be able to take back.

But there was no way for Lime to know that right now.

Study 04: The Scattered Slime

“Wow, Fuso really did cause some problems!”

Back in the present, Lime and Sapphee laughed together in the café in Lindworm. It was easy to joke about it now, but back when they were young, Fuso’s dependency had been a traumatic experience for Glenn, Sapphee, and even for Lime.

“Seriously...no doctor can fix a sick personality,” Sapphee said.

“I wonder what she’s doing now, yeah?”

“I heard she signed an exclusive contract with Loose Silk Sewing. She’s their most distinguished designer. She’s so famous that even Arahnia knows her. I don’t know where she’s based, but apparently she’s quite busy, and has many apprentices.”

Lime’s green face darkened. “Hopefully she won’t hear about Glenn...”

Sapphee sipped her tea.

Lime frowned at her. “You’re not drinking, yeah?”

“Alcohol? No. I need to go back to the clinic after this.”

“I always picture you drinking alcohol, yeah?”

“Maybe because *someone* is always causing me stress,” Sapphee said.

The bubbly slime pretended not to notice.

“It looks like Fuso is living her own life,” Sapphee said. “She’s not so attached to humans anymore...at least, I don’t think she is.”

“So, wishful thinking, yeah?”

“Shut up,” Sapphee snapped.

The notes of a song drifted over. It was Lulala, singing in the square adjacent to the café. Her songs were famous in Lindworm now, but they were also a reminder of the past.

Sapphee’s break was almost over.

“Shall we keep going?” Lime asked.

“Me, you, and Glenn. We saw so many patients at the Academy. Sure, we worked together in the lab, but Glenn got even busier after that. That’s why he’s forgotten...but even so.”

“It’s okay,” Lime said, contemplating her balloon-like fingers. “Sapphee...I wanted to talk to someone about what happened after that. Because, I really can’t tell anyone...”

When Sapphee looked up, she realized that the normally-cheerful Lime had tears in her eyes.

“Go ahead, then,” Sapphee said. “It all started when—”

“When Dr. Cthulhy made that unbelievable announcement before the final exam, yeah!”

Lime’s sudden, cheerful tone made Sapphee doubt whether she’d really been about to cry.

They were in a classroom at the Nemea Academy.

In front of them, Cthulhy stood behind a podium, watching her students with sharp eyes, as though she was trying to work out which of them would become capable doctors.

Class had ended, but the students were still in their seats, awaiting a big announcement. Final exams were in a week, so the atmosphere was tense.

“Has anyone heard of a city called Lindworm? Raise your hand if you have,” Cthulhy said.

About seventy percent of the students raised their hands. It was famous as a city where humans and monsters lived together. Glenn, of course, raised his hand, too.

“Now then, who can name the representative of that city? Saphentite.” Cthulhy pointed with her stick.

“Skadi Dragenfelt,” Sapphee answered right away.

“Correct. She is a friend of mine.” Cthulhy let out a loud sigh. “Lindworm is a new city. Thus, there are very few doctors there with the skill to treat a multitude of monsters. Skadi is looking for medical professionals to offer cutting-edge treatment. Not old-fashioned doctors who can only see certain species, or traditional healers who use things like faith and fortune-telling.”

As Glenn listened, he couldn’t help but think that this was all rather ridiculous. There was no one who could perform such integrated medicine. No one except Cthulhy.

“So, in two years, I will be moving to Lindworm,” said Cthulhy.

The students gasped in shock.

“Doctor? You’re going to Lindworm?”

“You’re going to abandon your teaching?!”

“What are we going to do? We need you!”

“Okay, okay, quiet down. This has already been decided. I will leave the Academy in two years. I have already spoken to Dean Rheocles. Associate Professor Nye will take over, so everyone still here will learn from her.”

The commotion only got worse. Glenn was just as confused as everyone else. If Cthulhy was leaving, that meant that she wouldn't be around for the end of his schooling, no matter how fast he worked. He was so surprised by this news, he couldn't even speak.

"Quiet! I haven't even gotten to the best part. Yes, I'll be going to Lindworm, but I'm not going to abandon my responsibilities here."

Everyone fell quiet at that.

"I will permit promising students to join me in Lindworm. They will study and work under me at the hospital I shall open there. It will be intense. But those who are passionate about medicine, who are prepared to learn on the job and, of course, who have high enough grades, are invited to join me in Lindworm."

The students took a deep, collective breath, but Cthulhy still wasn't done.

"The very best of the best—students whose knowledge and skill I can attest to—will be permitted to open a clinic in Lindworm. Listen well, because I'm only going to say this once. Any student who secures the necessary score will become a doctor. Any first-years and second-years are welcome to skip ahead. If your dream is to become a doctor, this is your chance. Anyone not prepared for this is exempt."

The classroom started buzzing again.

"What does that mean?"

"I could become a doctor without graduating?"

"Is she going to grant medical licenses to people who don't finish their studies?"

"Idiot! Dr. Cthulhy would never give out a license to someone who doesn't understand doctoral procedures."

"This is happening in just two years..."

"It's even *harder* than graduating normally..."

Everyone was talking at once.

The doctor's program at the Nemea Academy was a six-year course, but now they all had two years to finish, regardless of where they were in the program.

Glenn was stunned.

Lindworm...! Even if I graduate, I don't know if I'll be able to find a place where I can work and live in the monster realm. But Lindworm doesn't have any species barriers. Even a human like me can become a doctor...at least, I think so! I need to make this my new goal...

He was hanging on Cthulhy's every word.

"I will not set a limit," she said. "Two students could receive their license. Or ten! On the other hand, anyone who doesn't meet the requirements will not be certified, no matter how long you are here. Do you all understand? Those are the stakes. If you are capable, I will grant you a full score. If you are not, you will be given a zero. I will be strict."

Cthulhy wasn't someone inclined to play favorites, or to be lax with them. True, she paid more attention to the students she liked, and Glenn was one of them, but she also expected far more of those students. This part of her personality was often misunderstood. Even if she liked a student, she expected them to work hard, and she always maintained boundaries.

That's why it's strange that she's so close to Lime...

Glenn chuckled to himself, but then realized he was being condescending. He needed to focus on his own path. To continue learning under Cthulhy, he needed to prove that he was capable of accompanying her to Lindworm, which meant he needed to spend his remaining two years studying even harder than before.

“It will be tough, but I will reward anyone who is prepared to do what it takes,” Cthulhy said. “That is all.”

In his mind, Glenn’s goals had already shifted.

“You sure are enthusiastic,” Sapphee remarked.

She was gathering her research reports while Glenn read a thick medical textbook, taking notes sparingly. Paper was a precious commodity, but it was impossible to get by without using at least some of it. He only noted down the things he absolutely had to remember.

“Huh? Sapphee, did you say something?”

“Nothing. I’m sorry to interrupt you.”

“Yeah.”

Glenn only lifted his head for a moment, then he was buried in his studies again. He’d always maintained a high level of concentration, but this was something else.

“He’s really working hard, yeah,” said Lime.

Sapphee finished collecting reports and started pruning herbs. “Of course he is. After an announcement like that...”

Lime grinned as she watched Glenn, buried in his book. “Glenn, name the bones in the hind legs of a centaur, starting with the femur.”

“Femur, patella, tibia, fibula, tarsals, metatarsals...”

“Wow! I don’t know what the answer is, but you’re probably right! Amazing, Glenn, yeah!”

Glenn hadn’t even looked up. Sapphee looked disgusted that Lime was asking questions that she didn’t

even know the answer to, but Lime didn't seem to care.

"Hee hee. At this rate, he just might get to go with Cthulhy to Lindworm, yeah?"

"I'm sure that's what he's aiming for. I'm glad he's working hard, but I'm a little worried. Glenn, don't overdo it."

Glenn grunted. It was hard to tell if he was listening or not.

Sapphee sighed.

"What are you going to do, Sapphee? Are you going to open a pharmacy...?"

Sapphee shook her head. She looked resigned. "I can't. There's no way I can obtain all the knowledge I need to open a pharmacy in just two years. I was planning to just keep studying until I graduate...but that won't be easy, either. I think my only choice is to work under Dr. Cthulhy and help her mix medicines."

"In that case, your path is to work at her hospital as a pharmacist? You don't want to work with a doctor in Lindworm?"

"If I could, that would be the best option," Sapphee said, glancing over at Glenn.

Her expectations for him were high.

"What are you going to do, Lime? Are you going with Dr. Cthulhy?"

"Hmmm...I guess I probably will, yeah."

"Won't it be really hard working at the hospital, though?" Sapphee asked.

"It'll be fine, yeah!"

Lime sure was optimistic. Although she claimed she never studied, she was as cheerful as ever.

"I want to go to Lindworm," Glenn said.

"Were you even listening?"

Glenn still didn't lift his head from the textbook. "I was."

The ability to concentrate on one thing without losing sight of everything else was an important skill for a doctor. Sapphee took a break to make some tea for him. She set the water to boiling on the stove.

"I want to learn more about monsters," he said.

"I think you've learned plenty already," Sapphee said.

"It's not enough. When I treated Cerve, I relied too much on textbooks. With Fuso... I mean, I didn't know the first thing about the silkworm gods. There's still so much I don't know."

"Glenn..."

"My parents were against me coming to the Nemea Academy, and the prejudice against monsters is still strong back home. On the other hand, coming to this school has allowed me to reevaluate what I consider to be rare or unique." Glenn finally lifted his head, looking straight at Sapphee. "I...like monsters."

Sapphee's eyes widened with surprise.

"I'm interested in their ecology," Glenn said. "And how all of the various species have their own unique lifestyles and cultures. No matter how much I read, it's not enough."

"Wh-what, is that all?"

"Sapphee?"

"Oh, it's nothing."

Sapphee turned away, clearly annoyed. Lime grinned.

"I want to learn more about monsters, like you two. I want to get to know you better. I want to *help* monsters. That's why I want to be a doctor. And...someday, I want to be a bridge that brings humans and monsters together."

"So, *that's* why you spend so much time with us, yeah?" Lime snickered.

Glenn's expression remained serious.

"That's weird, yeah," said Lime. "We're right here. If you want to get to know us, then just go ahead. You don't need big life goals to do that, yeah?"

"It's fine. This is good, Glenn." Sapphee smiled gently and poured tea for them. "It may look easy, but it's actually quite difficult to get to know other species. Glenn understands that, and that's why he wants to be a doctor. He isn't just thinking about us. He's thinking about every single species on the continent."

"I-It's not that big of a deal." Glenn waved his hand, flustered. "I'm just interested."

"You're doing an amazing thing, Glenn," said Sapphee.

That's why he wanted to go to Lindworm. It was a town where humans and monsters lived together. Maybe he could learn more just by living there. Sapphee tried to imagine how humans and monsters could cohabit, what sorts of possibilities that might present. Maybe it would end up changing the entire continent.

"That's why I study so much. Once I graduate, that's not the end of it."

"Glenn?"

"There's always going to be so much more to learn," he said. "I'm sure that in Lindworm I'll have to see way more patients. Not all of them will have common symptoms. I plan to continue studying monsters until I die."

Lime stared at Glenn, open-mouthed. "Whoa..."

"I will always need to keep researching what patients are thinking, what they're seeking... then I can decide how to proceed. You two taught me that, here in this laboratory."

"Heh! Is that so?" said Lime. "You're embarrassing me!"

"Don't make fun of him," Sapphee said gently.

Glenn made a fist in front of his chest. "That's why I'm going to Lindworm."

"I'm sure you can do it." Sapphee nodded. "But don't *overdo* it, Glenn."

"That's right! You should never overdo it, yeah!"

"Maybe *you* could stand to overdo it a little, Lime," Sapphee retorted. "Ever try studying?"

Lime squirmed in protest. "Wha?!"

"On the other hand," Sapphee admitted. "You're really good at knowing what people want. That's a necessary quality in medicine."

"Heh heh. Really? I'm just getting praised all over the place today, yeah!"

"I wouldn't go that far, but you *are* an important member of the lab."

"Hee hee. Well, even though I'm not good at studying, I have an important mission, yeah! I haven't been at the Academy all this time for nothing!"

"You've been here so long because you can't advance to the next level..." Sapphee muttered.

Glenn had grown quiet again, but his ears were red. Maybe he was embarrassed to speak his goals out loud. Sapphee noticed that he had dark circles under his eyes. The lab wasn't the only place he studied. After returning to

his dorm at night, he probably kept reading by lamp light. Sapphee really hoped he didn't push himself too hard.

"Maybe I'll become a pharmacist. Then Glenn and I could work together." Sapphee said quietly, so Glenn wouldn't hear her.

But Lime *did* hear, and she smiled.

Rather than worrying about the future, Glenn focused on the book in front of him and continued his research.

"I'm late..."

The sun had already set over the Nemea Academy, and Glenn was running. All the students lived in dorms, but Glenn's was impossibly far from the medical department. If he didn't hurry back, they'd lock him out.

Sapphee always told him to leave early, but he preferred to stay in the lab as long as possible. Obviously, the other students in his dorm were all monsters and they weren't medical students, so very few of them were willing to talk to Glenn. He wanted to get to know his dormmates, but his roommate had decided they couldn't live with a human and dropped out of the Academy, so Glenn was left in his room alone.

After that traumatic experience, he didn't know how to even *try* and get along with the rest of the dorm. Perhaps he should talk to Lime about it.

"Once I get to the dorm, I need to eat dinner, then I'll review...ummm, I think it was skin and respiratory diseases and treatment in amphibious monsters? Oh, and I have to finish my report, and..."

As usual, Glenn was muttering to himself. His dorm was at the bottom of a steep staircase. It was dark, and as such it wasn't a popular spot. Many a student had slipped and gotten hurt, but the Academy was a growing campus within a growing city, and everyone was busy, so fixing this tiny staircase wasn't on anyone's list of priorities.

"Ohh...I forgot it's my turn to clean the dorms tomorrow. I have to do that, too."

Glenn groaned. He needed to be more organized, especially if he wanted to become a great doctor. He came to the Academy to achieve his dreams, and even gone against his parents' wishes.

"Father, Mother, Sioux..."

Glenn hurried the narrow stairs. He'd never thought he would be homesick, but when things got rough, he thought of his family. His father had practically disowned him, but that didn't mean Glenn had stopped caring.

If he ever went back, it would be as a successful doctor. Glenn wouldn't allow it any other way.

"I wonder how they are? I hope Sioux is doing well."

He preferred to focus on his cheerful younger sister. He didn't care so much about his older brother. He'd practically welcomed Glenn running away.

Glenn wondered if Sioux was healthy, and hoped his parents hadn't fallen ill. In the moments when he did think of his family, he always ended up wondering about their health.

He was only a little sleep-deprived, but he had a lot on his mind and wasn't watching his step. That was why it happened.

"What—?"

He took a step down, but there was no step to meet his foot. In his haste, he'd lost his footing.

"Ahhh!"

Glenn's world spun. He fell down the staircase in the dark, too exhausted to catch himself.

"Er..."

He could see stars. He'd fallen from very high up and suffered a blow to his occipital region. He was bleeding. Curious. He could catalog his symptoms, but he couldn't move. Nor did he feel any pain.

Ahh, this isn't good.

The lack of pain meant the injury was severe. He was going numb. If he didn't do something soon, he'd be in real trouble. Glenn knew that, but as soon as he realized it, his consciousness went out like a light. As though someone had blown out a candle.

"You didn't need to come, Lime."

"Don't mention it. It's a great opportunity, yeah! And it's almost curfew. They might not let a female student in."

"You're not planning on taking a male form, are you?"

"Just long enough to give this to the RA!"

Two women carefully descended the uneven staircase to the boys' dormitory.

"Glenn is so careless," Sapphee said. "I can't believe he forgot his textbook."

"Heh heh. You're the one who suggested coming all the way out here to give it back. You want to see him that badly,

yeah?”

“It’s not like that.”

Sure, Glenn would be back tomorrow, and he could wait until then to get his book back but, in truth, Sapphee and Lime wanted to see him.

The Nemea Academy produced excellent students. In other words, it had a strict curriculum. Friendships between students were an irreplaceable part of the experience. Wanting to see Glenn’s face, even for a moment, was normal. At least, that’s what Sapphee told herself.

“Huh?”

At the bottom of the stairs, Sapphee saw the outline of a body.

It actually took her a moment to notice the shape. Lamia could detect heat, and Sapphee often used this ability to complement her eyesight, especially in the dark. The fact that she hadn’t notice the fallen person right away meant that they’d been lying there long enough to get cold.

Sapphee screamed. “Glenn...? Glenn?!”

Lime was still catching up. “Er, ah, huh?!”

Sapphee could barely keep it together, but passing out wouldn’t help. Glenn had fallen. That was all she needed to jump into action.

“Glenn, can you hear me?! Glenn?!”

She followed the emergency first aid procedures that had been drilled into her—leaning close to his face to make sure he was still breathing and wrapping her tail around his wrist to check his pulse.

“He’s breathing, and he has a pulse, but...” Both were incredibly weak. He was in serious danger. “Glenn! Open your eyes, Glenn!”

That's when she realized her hands were covered with blood. There was a wound somewhere on the back of his head.

Sapphee was on the verge of panic. "No, no... it can't be, no, Glenn."

This much blood meant a laceration of the scalp. Even if she acted quickly, it could be fatal.

"You said you were going to be a doctor and go to Lindworm! You can't give up now... Glenn!"

But he couldn't hear her.

"Not yet, yeah," Lime said.

She transformed herself into a sheet and wrapped himself around him, closing over his wounds and making sure that his mouth and nose were still exposed, so he could breathe. For now, she could keep him safe and stable.

"We don't have time to take him to the hospital," Lime said. "I'm going to bring him to the treatment room. Go get Dr. Cthulhy! She'll still be in the classroom."

"But Lime...in that state, even Dr. Cthulhy can't—"

"I'm not giving up!" Lime exclaimed. "I've stopped the bleeding and I can protect him for a short while. But we need Dr. Cthulhy to look at him right away! If you're going to be a doctor, then you can't ever give up until it's over, yeah?!"

"Oh..." Sapphee caught herself. She'd almost given in to despair. "Yes. You're right. Of course."

"I'll go as fast as I can," said Lime. "So keep up!"

Even wrapped around Glenn's body, she could move quickly. And her slime could absorb enough of the impact to cushion him.

How long can he last? Sapphee thought. Ten minutes? Fifteen? Can he be treated in time?

She was a prodigy in her own right, and she used her superior brain to calculate every minute possibility. Still, in the end, all she could do was pray that he would stay alive long enough.

“Head contusion...skull fracture...” Cthulhy examined Glenn in a voice as cool and calm as ice. That was the level of stoicism required of a doctor. “There is damage to his skull. He has lost a lot of blood. If there is brain damage—”

“Wh-what?” Sapphee interrupted.

Even in the Nemea Academy, with its advanced medical program, brain damage was almost always fatal. Cthulhy might not be able to save him, even with an operation.

“If the fractured skull has pierced his brain, then there’s nothing we can—”

“No, Dr. Cthulhy! Isn’t there anything you can do?!”

“If there was, I’d already be doing it.”

Sapphee clung to Cthulhy, who was trying to comfort her. The treatment room fell silent.

They had to do something fast. Sapphee couldn’t stand it.

Cthulhy’s expression was stern. “Luckily, he’s still breathing. Perhaps the damage to the brain is minimal. We need to drain the blood and stitch the wound.”

Sapphee had a sinking feeling. Even if they saved his life, the chances were there would be lasting side effects. He

might develop a memory disorder or learning disabilities. Perhaps, he would even have to give up on becoming a doctor.

“Dr. Cthulhy...I’ll help. I’ll do whatever I can!”

“Stop being ridiculous. Sapphee, Lime, you both need to leave the room. You’re not doctors and you can’t help. Let me take care of this!”

“But if there are aftereffects, then Glenn’s dream—”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Cthulhy snapped. “I’ll do my best. That’s all I can do. The only thing you two can do right now is pray.”

Sapphee looked down at Glenn. They’d bandaged his head, but he was still bleeding a little. The wound must be deep. What medicine did he need? What treatment? No matter how much she’d learned, there was nothing she could do.

“Dr. Cthulhy,” Lime said quietly, putting her hand under Glenn’s head. Her fingers melted to form a pillow. “*That* method would be the best option right now, yeah? Don’t you think?”

“No, Lime. We can’t do that.”

“Isn’t that why we’ve been working together for so long? The animal trials are complete.”

“I said *no*.”



Sapphee looked between them. “L-Lime? What are you talking about? Is there a way to save him? But...you were always sleeping during neurology class.”

“Heh. There’s another way, yeah.”

Lime looked proud and incredibly sure of herself.

Cthulhy let out a deep sigh. “Fine. We’ll try. If we’re lucky, it will save his life with very few aftereffects. If not...”

“U-um, Dr. Cthulhy? What are you talking about?”

“Come on, Sapphee. You know I don’t like incompetence. Lime gets poor grades on all her tests. She never listens in class. Why would I keep such a student by my side for so long?”

Lime opened her mouth in protest, but then seemed to think better of it.

“The ancestors of scyllas were once called malevolent gods,” said Cthulhy.

“Y-yes,” said Sapphee. “I know the legend.” Scyllas were descended from evil deities of the deep seas. It was a legacy that they weren’t particularly fond of, and generally tried to keep secret.

“Those malevolent gods apparently employed slime-like creatures to care for them. These creatures were called shoggoths. The shoggoths had amorphous bodies and could take on any shape. They could be used for battle and household chores...and even to repair damaged organs.” Cthulhy took up the operating tools in her tentacles. “I believe that modern slimes diverged from the shoggoth, resulting in the birth of a new species.”

Cthulhy spread green slime on Glenn’s head, as if icing a cake.

“You don’t mean...”

“Sapphee, I have been researching the regeneration of organs and blood using slime tissue. Lime has been helping me.”

“Really?”

It was an extraordinary idea. Slime body tissue had incredible plasticity, but they could only manipulate the *appearance* of their bodies. They couldn't transform into actual bodily tissues, blood vessels, or internal organs... could they?

“I can do it.” Lime smiled, unperturbed by the fact that some of her tissue had sunk into Glenn's wound. “I can regenerate large amounts of blood in mice, dogs, and cats. Slime gel is capable of changing into whatever material is surrounding it. I've been practicing with Dr. Cthulhy for a long time.”

Sapphee was silent.

“Glenn's body is still alive,” said Lime. “I'm just helping him heal, yeah? I follow Dr. Cthulhy's instructions and convert the part of me that's inside Glenn. That's all there is to it, yeah.”

Sapphee finally understood why Lime had worked with Cthulhy for so long...and why she'd never been expelled.

“Hmmm. It looks like bone fragments *did* reach the cranial nerves, yeah.” Lime reported.

If she could diagnose his internal injuries simply through contact, then maybe her body had far more potential as a medical tool than Sapphee had ever imagined.

Cthulhy was watching Lime carefully.

“Let's regenerate the tissue from the cranial bone to the cranial nerves, yeah.”

“The cranial nerves?” Cthulhy bit the end of one of her tentacles. “Lime, I’m sure this treatment will save Glenn’s life, but you understand the implications of recreating his cranial nerves...right?”

“It’s okay. I can do it, yeah!”

“I trust you.” Cthulhy turned to Sapphee. “We are going to repair his nerve damage. Lime is capable of returning his blood, vessels, and organs to their original state. However, nerve vessels are more delicate. We don’t know if the damaged parts will go back to what they once were. Please prepare yourself for that possibility.”

“Pr-prepare?”

“His life will be saved, but there may be an issue with his brain function. He may even lose some of his memories, especially recent ones.” Cthulhy seemed unsure about exactly what would happen. “Regardless, I am sure that Glenn will not need to give up on his dream. He’s pursued it for so long. I believe he will see that dream come true.”

Cthulhy looked down lovingly at her favorite pupil.

“I-I believe it, too!” said Sapphee. “I’m sure you’re right.”

“That’s why, after the procedure is over, no matter what happens to Glenn, you need to follow up, Sapphee.”

Sapphee nodded.

Lime was literally grinning from ear to ear. “I’ll follow up, too!”

“Let’s begin,” said Cthulhy. “Concentrate hard, Lime.”

“Leave it to me, yeah!”

Sapphee thought back on all the moments that she and Glenn had shared. She remembered the first time they’d met at his family home, and their awkward, unexpected reunion

at the Academy. She hadn't been able to bring herself to talk to him at first, but they'd still ended up in the lab together.

"It's okay," Lime assured her. Sapphee was grateful for her kindness. "He won't forget everything. The effects will be minimal, yeah?"

Sapphee could tell she was lying. "Lime..."

Even Lime didn't understand what the consequences would be. She was just guessing. No...she was trying to make Sapphee feel better. But Sapphee would believe the lie, at least for now.

"People sometimes remember things they forgot, yeah?"

"True."

Sapphee held Glenn's hand. It was the only thing she could do. Glenn was going to be a doctor. That dream couldn't end. He'd take everything he learned here—from Cerve, Bellmer, Fuso—with him to Lindworm.

"Time to start, Lime."

"Yes! Now I'll show you the true ability of the oldest apprentice in Cthulhy's classroom!"

And so they began.

Cthulhy used her tools to open Glenn's skull and transplant Lime's tissue into him. Sapphee kept her eyes closed.

Glenn...

Instead, she called out his name in her heart, over and over.

The final exams were over.

Lime looked over the list of results posted in the school lobby. She'd thought about scanning up from the bottom. After all, it would be easier to find her rank that way. After the surgery was over, she'd needed time to recover. She hadn't been able to properly prepare for the tests.

Well, that's a pickle, yeah.

Lime chuckled. She'd have to start studying seriously soon, or Cthulhy would be angry with her. It seemed unlikely that Cthulhy would take her to Lindworm simply because of her transformative abilities.

Lime liked her mentor. She liked Glenn and Sapphee, too. She hated saying goodbye, so she wanted to do everything she could to stay with them. That was her only goal now.

"Ah..."

The top of the medical department was exactly as expected.

Glenn Litbeit was at the top of the list and, directly beneath him, Saphentite Neikes.

Glenn, then Sapphee...good.

Even after everything that had happened, they'd both managed to keep their grades up. Glenn would be a doctor. He'd go to Lindworm. And Sapphee would accompany him. Lime inadvertently turned into a ball, bouncing up and down the hallway.

"Oh!"

There was Glenn now, looking at the list. It was the first time she'd seen him since the surgery. Cthulhy had watched over his recovery.

Everyone, even Glenn, knew that he'd fallen and hit his head. But they'd told him his injuries were minimal. The only people who knew he'd almost died were the three of them.

Lime bounced over, returned to human form, and tapped him on the shoulder. "Glenn!"

"Oh, Miss Lime?"

"Yes, it's me, everyone's favorite Lime, yeah! You're amazing, Glenn. Top of the class! Even after your injury... amazing, yeah!" she said. "Let's go, yeah?"

"Go?" Glenn tilted his head to one side, confused. "U-uhh, Miss Lime...? Where...are we going?"

That was when she understood. Glenn had forgotten all about her.

"Oh, uh, to the laboratory, yeah. But..."

"Why?" Glenn asked.

Lime stopped herself. Nothing good would come of pursuing this.

"Ohh, uh, it's nothing, yeah."

Glenn bowed his head. "Then I'll see you in class!"

He turned away, and Lime was left standing in the hall, speechless.

She sighed. She couldn't let anyone see her cry. What had happened to Glenn was a secret. She'd never be able to share it with anyone.

Glenn had a future. He was on a mission to become a doctor, and it was Sapphee's mission, too. After all, she loved him. Lime didn't want to get in the way.

"E-er..."

She kept herself from crying through sheer force of will. Glenn had forgotten the days they'd spent together in the

lab.

“Ahhh.”

Somehow, she would keep her emotions in check. She was good at pretending everything was okay. After all, there was no one else in the world as good at transforming into something she wasn't.

“I'm fine, yeah? Fine.”

Lime buried her feelings somewhere deep. There was no point in wallowing in it.

Instead, she put on a happy face and bid her former friend farewell.

Epilogue: Connecting Memories

“It sounds like he *did* lose his short-term memory,” Cthulhy concluded.

“Ohhh.”

“But only his time in the lab has vanished,” Sapphee said. “He’s retained more recent memories.”

Lime was spread on the floor, her usual cheerful demeanor all but gone.

“There are many possible causes,” said Cthulhy.

“Like what?”

“Either Lime’s repairs were incomplete, or I made a mistake when I reconnected the nerves. It’s also possible that the surgery had nothing to do with it, and the memory loss was caused by his fall.”

“I see.”

There was still so much they didn’t know about the brain. Even Cthulhy couldn’t be sure what had happened.

“However, I don’t think his memories are completely lost,” she said.

“What?!”

“He remembers everything except for you, Lime. There’s no explanation for that. Perhaps it’s related to the shock of the injury or the effects of the surgery.”

“Oh! So, when...? When will he remember?!” she asked.

“I don’t know. It could be ten years, or twenty, or even longer.”

Lime had briefly returned to her human form, but upon hearing Cthulhy's reply, she dissolved back into a blob. Sapphee could only imagine how unbearable it must be for her.

"But..." Cthulhy's face was stern again. "Please avoid talking about the lab as much as possible."

"Doctor?"

"Forcing someone to recall something can cause them a great deal of stress. As long as he remembers Sapphee, whom he was closest to... Lime, it would be better if you tried not to talk to Glenn."

Lime was spread out on the floor, quivering. "Uhh..."

She would have to forget one of her closest friends.

"This is a secret the three of us must keep. And so, we will all go to Lindworm together."

"Doctor?"

"If he does remember someday, wouldn't it be wonderful if we were all in the same town?" Cthulhy smiled gently. "Lime, you'd better get studying."

"Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse!"

Cthulhy had meant to encourage her, but it only made Lime cry more.

"Looking back now, we went through so much."

Lime wiped her eyes. "I know! But...when will Glenn stop treating me like a stranger?"

She'd worked hard. Somehow, she'd wrangled permission to work at Lindworm Central Hospital. She didn't

have many opportunities to talk to Glenn, but she still had hope that he'd remember her someday.

"It must be rough, Lime."

"Huh?"

"I don't think I could handle it. I think my love is too burdensome." Sapphee sighed.

She'd changed so much from when they were students. She had accepted her feelings, for one thing. Sapphee wondered how she would have felt if Glenn had forgotten about her instead of Lime. It made her chest feel tight.

"Sapphee...you remember what I told you, yeah?"

"Which time?"

Lime looked her in the eyes. "I told you that he wouldn't forget everything."

"You said that right before the surgery."

"So...I have to believe the same thing. I have to believe that he'll remember someday."

"I see..."

Lime was a prisoner of her own words. She had nothing else to cling to.

Sapphee didn't know how she could help. Maybe she'd put too much distance between them. She should have listened to Lime, and perhaps even responded to some of her ridiculous requests. How much pain was she hiding beneath that smile?

"By the way, did you meet with Molly?" Sapphee asked, trying to change the subject.

"Oh. M-my ancestor, yeah?" Lime looked away. "I mean, I think she's an ancestor of mine, since she's a shoggoth, but —"

“But?”

“When I see her, I get all puddly. I don’t know why. It’s like...I’m not myself. Maybe it’s because she’s stronger than me. If she were to suck me up, I wouldn’t be able to escape, yeah.”

Lime quivered. Molly wouldn’t ever absorb anyone. At least...probably not. But Lime’s instincts made her fear it.

“It seems like the medical revolution won’t come from slimes after all, but...what if my ancestors are skilled at healing?” Lime asked. “I want to talk to her about it, but every time I try, I shake like jelly.”

“You weren’t able to advance the slime treatment for partial lesions?”

“Apparently, other slimes couldn’t create internal organs as well as me. Cthulhy’s at her wit’s end. Everyone else takes too much time to even make veins, let alone attach them. I don’t know why I’m the only one who can do it well, yeah...”

“Hmm.”

Lime really was quite talented. Sapphee was impressed.

“But, well...I guess it’s because I can concentrate. If you can’t imagine it clearly in your mind, then it takes time to transform.”

“Oh, there you are.”

They turned to see Glenn enter the diner. Lime covered her mouth with both hands. How much had he heard?

“D-Dr. Glenn?!” she cried. “What about the clinic?”

“I took a short break. The fairies said you were here. Look!”

Glenn held up a basket. It was filled with limes.

“One of my regulars gave it to me. The farmer, Randy. He said the crop was good this year. These are for you, Miss Lime.”

“Huh? For me?”

“They’re your favorite, right? Please, take them.”

He’d remembered that? Sapphee couldn’t tell how much of Glenn’s memory was clear, and how much he’d lost.

Lime smiled awkwardly. “Oh, ohh... thank you, Glenn.” She was probably hesitant to say anything more.

“You’re always working so hard,” Glenn said.

“Oh, n-no, yeah...”

“I think it must be difficult to work under Dr. Cthulhy, but if you’d like, I hope we can study together again sometime, Miss Lime. I’m always looking to learn new medicine.”

Sapphee and Lime stared at him in surprise.

Even Glenn seemed taken aback at his own words. “Oh... we d-did study together before, right?”

Lime hesitated, then broke into a smile like a flower blooming. “Actually, we did, yeah! What, did you forget, Glenn?!”

“Ah, well, I was always studying...I don’t remember much else.”

“We all studied together! You, me, and Sapphee, yeah!” Lime was bouncing now, drawing very close to Glenn. “It’s fine! We can start making up for lost time by studying or doing anything else together.”

“Anything else...?”

Lime twisted around, flirting with him. “Ohhh, stop! Yeah?”

Sapphee sighed inwardly. She knew she should be happy that Glenn's memory had returned, but...

"My break is just about over," she said, poking Lime.

"Oh, meeahh!"

"Are you a cat? What kind of noise is that?"

"Doctor, we need to get to the clinic," Sapphee said.

"Oh, y-yeah..."

"Wait! Just a little longer!" said Lime, taking Glenn's hand. "Let's talk just a little more!"

"S-sorry Miss Lime. We have afternoon exams. Next time."

"Lime, how long do you have to play hooky before Dr. Cthulhy gets mad at you?" Sapphee asked. "She'll cut your pay again."

"Ahhh, you're right. I should go, too."

She was talking too loudly, but seeing Lime cheerful again made Sapphee smile. She had to admit, it was like a weight had lifted. It was as if the slime tissue connecting Glenn's cranial nerves had...

Is it possible?

Glenn looked over at her as he took care of the bill. "Sapphee? What's wrong?"

She hadn't even noticed he was paying for her. "Oh, n-no, it's nothing."

Maybe the part of Lime that had been used to repair Glenn's nerves had finally adapted to his body. Lime had said that she had to imagine it clearly.

That would be something.

She wondered what Cthulhy would have to say about this. Still, for now it was all just speculation. But, even if he

didn't fully remember yet, it seemed likely that the part of Lime that was inside Glenn might one day help him recover his memories.

Lime waved, a smile lighting up her whole face. "Glenn! Let's hang out again sometime."

Glenn returned the wave awkwardly.

"There are even more rivals now," Sapphee muttered.

"Hmm? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing," she said.

She started down the road toward the clinic, struggling to keep a straight face.

Behind them, Lime stood in the middle of the street, waving at them until they were well out of sight.



Afterword

Hello! Yoshino Origuchi here.

Welcome to the before-times, *Monster Girl Doctor Zero*. What did you think?

It has the sort of bittersweet ending that I wouldn't be able to get away with in the regular series. I know some people won't like this. I'm sure there are many different ways the story could have gone, but please, take this as a bit of spice to add to the *Monster Girl Doctor* universe.

Lime is the heroine of this story. At first, it was a lazy name for her because she is a slime but, thanks to Solopip B's designs, she turned out pretty cute. Thank you very much! He also designed young Glenn, young Sapphee, and the other patients. He has the best eye.

I really like Draconia. Alligators are so cute, don't you think? I love it when they sunbathe with their huge mouths open. It's not like I want to pet them, but I don't think the only way to love animals is by petting and doting on the fluffy ones. I know I'm in the minority.

I announced that *MGD Zero* would be a manga as well, but that's running behind schedule. I can't give you any details right now, but I think the editing department will make an announcement if things go well. Please be patient!

As for this book, I hope you noticed how adorable Cerve, Bellmer, and Fuso were.

The anime is progressing well, too. All of the staff are helpful, and since it's my first anime, I was surprised and impressed with the writers. It's an interesting world I never knew about. I even went to the auditions. I was blown away by the voice actors and their skills. I came to the acute

realization that when your work is adapted and animated, it leaves you and grows into something new...

I would also like to say thanks to some people.

To my editor, Hibi-u-san, who is always watching over me. Thank you. The anime world is new to me, so I've needed a lot of help. I look forward to continuing working with you.

Also, to Z-ton-sensei, thank you for your illustrations. I've caused you a lot of trouble with the anime. I know you have to do a lot more work now, but let's get through this together. Also, thanks to Thomas Kanemaki from Comicalize. I think this book is coming out around the same time as the second manga. I hope that the *Monster Girl Doctor* manga releases will come more quickly.

Also, thank you to Solopip B for your work on this book. Thank you for making the *Zero* characters so attractive. It's thanks to you that this book turned out so well. I got a little too excited when writing Fuso's chapter (oops!).

And thank you to the entire anime staff. I always need a lot of help there. I hope it becomes a series that fans love. I know it's a lot of work, but thank you for doing it.

Also, thank you to all of the artists who speak to me. I'm talking about the manga artists and illustrators on Twitter, etc. S-B0W, the owner of Jingai Only, and the entire staff. Thank you to everyone working at bookstores throughout the country. Thank you to the *Comic Ryu* reps and editorial staff, and my family, whom I haven't seen much since I left home. Thank you to the proofreaders who find every teeny tiny mistake. And to all of you readers, I am forever grateful.

The next book will probably be Volume 8. Glenn goes home and tells his parents he's getting married.

Who will be the star of that book? Huh? The lecherous
plant monsters? Really?

—Yoshino Origuchi

About the Author, Yoshino Origuchi

Right before I wrote this comment, the Volume 7 reprint was decided upon, and things are moving at a fast rate. This is all thanks to those of you who continue to support me.

I will continue to work diligently so that I can continue to fill the world with monster girls.

About the Illustrator, Z-ton

Lime appeared just briefly in a previous book, but she was the star of this one. I always imagined her having arms and legs like gelatin, but it turns out she's a cute girl. Sorry, Lime...



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